

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

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QUITE ALONE.

BOOK THE FIRST: CHILDHOOD.

CHAPTER V. THE BUNNYCASTLES IN COUNCIL.

THE back parlour at Rhododendron House, dedicated to the nocturnal meal spoken of in the preceding chapter, was a very moderately-sized apartment. Indeed, if an observer of its dimensions had hazarded an opinion that there wasn't room to swing a cat in it, the remark, although coarse (and, as such, naturally intolerable in an establishment so genteel as Rhododendron House), would not have fallen very far short of the truth. This is intended to be a candid history; so I will at once confess that the back parlour was—well, what shall I say?—poky. A pair of folding-doors took up very nearly one of its sides, and these gave admittance to the front parlour, or drawing-room, or state saloon, which was furnished in a style of classic but frigid splendour, and where parents, guardians, and other visitors, to whom the Bunnycastles desired to show ceremonial honour, were received. No pupil dared to enter that sacred apartment without permission. Many, indeed, never saw it from the day when they arrived at school, and were regaled with the sacrificial cake and wine (both of British manufacture), to the day when their friends came to fetch them away. Even the Bunnycastles were chary about intruding on their *Sala Regia*, save on festive or solemn occasions. The back parlour was essentially their keeping and sitting chamber—their bower and their home.

The late Mr. Bunycastle's portrait hung on one side of the modest pier-glass on the mantel, and an effigy—a very vile one—in crayons, of Mrs. Bunycastle, flanked it. Opposite, was a small cottage piano; and you will see, by-and-by, that Rhododendron House was famous for its specimens of modern improvements on the harpsichord and the spinet. The window-curtains were of a dull decorous moreen; the carpets of a faded crimson. The table had a cloth in imitation needlework, like a schoolgirl's sampler of unwonted size taken out of its frame. The chairs were of well-worn green leather. In a recess were three handsome mahogany desks and three rosewood workboxes, respectively pertaining to the three sisters Bunycastle. Mrs. B.'s great black leather writing-case, where she

kept her school register, and her account-books, and her valuables, had an occasional table to itself; and when I have added to the pictorial embellishments of the room, an agreeable although somewhat faded engraving of Pharaoh's Daughter finding the Infant Moses in the Bull-rushes, and when I have remarked that on each side of the window hung a cage containing a canary, both of which were unceasingly watched by a grey cat of sly and jesuitical mien, I may be absolved from further performance of my favourite but unpopular part of the broker's man.

It was the same summer evening—the evening of the day of the flower-show at Chiswick, and of Griffin Blunt's rendezvous with the plasterer's wife at the sign of the Goat. The hour was half-past nine, and the Bunnycastles were sitting down to supper. Pepper, the maid, a demure person far gone into spinsterhood, attended upon them. The Miss Bunnycastles had a decided objection to "bits of girls," as they were accustomed to call all female domestics under five-and-twenty. Every servant at Rhododendron House was expected to be thirty years of age, or to wear caps and a countenance corresponding to that period in life. Pepper's christian name happened to be Marian; but she was rigidly addressed as "Pepper," and every servant in the house went by her surname. It averted the possibility of familiarity on the part of the young ladies.

The supper was not a very sumptuous repast. It never was. Frugality, as well as early rising and timeous retiring, formed the rule at Rhododendron House; and the Miss Bunnycastles were small eaters. There was the remnant of a leg of mutton, cold, grinning in a very ghastly manner after its ordeal on the operating table at the one o'clock dinner. It was brought up more for ornament than for use, and unless some friend dropped in—a very small and select circle of acquaintances were so permitted to pay visits at supper-time—it was rarely subjected to the renewed action of the knife. Miss Adelaide Bunycastle supped on a small basin of arrow-root. Miss Celia seldom partook of any refreshment more nourishing than a minute parallelogram of stale bread, and a diminutive cube of cheese, with, perhaps, a slip or two of pickled cabbage; and Miss Barbara habitually contented herself with a slice of bread-and-butter. Yet all of them would have submitted to the severest of

sacrifices rather than go without that which they imaginatively styled their "supper." Only with Mrs. Bunycastle did the meal assume the aspect of substantiality, and not of an airy and fanciful myth. She really supped. A nice bit of rumpsteak, or a boiled collop, or an egg and a slice of ham, or a mutton-chop; something warm, and meaty, and comfortable, in fact, was always prepared for her.

The beverage in which, and in the strictest moderation, the Miss Bunycastles indulged during their unpretending banquet, was the no more aristocratic one than table-ale of the very smallest brewing. There could scarcely have been malt enough, in a whole cask of it, to have given a headache to the rat that ate the malt that lay in the House that Jack built. The ladies took two or three sips of the mawkish infusion of gyle and hops, which had been more frightened than fermented by the yeast, and the ceremonial supper beer was over. But Mrs. Bunycastle was nightly provided a pint of the very best bottled stout. Nor—my protest of candour being duly allowed—shall I be taking an unwarrantable liberty, I infer, in hinting that after supper the good old lady was accustomed to refect herself with a tumbler three parts full of a curious and generously smelling mixture, of which the component parts appeared to be hot water, lemon-peel, sugar, and juniper.

On this particular flower-show evening, the Bunycastle meal was of an extraordinary festive character, and the conversation of an unusually animated nature. Not that there was anything more to eat than usual, but there was a guest. The Midsummer holidays were just over, nearly all the pupils had returned, and some new pupils (all of them to learn extras) had arrived. Hence one reason for jubilation. Then, the quarterly bills had been paid by the majority of the parents and guardians, and with not more grumbling or reductions than usual. Another cause for joyfulness. Finally, Mr. Drax, the apothecary, had looked in to supper, and the Bunycastles were all very glad to see him.

Mr. Drax was the very discreetest of apothecaries to be found in College-street, Clapham, in the county of Surrey, or anywhere else you like to name. The first evidence of his discretion was in his keeping, by word and deed, his age a profound secret. He was the oldest looking young man, or the youngest looking old man in the medical profession, or, for the matter of that, out of it. You might have fancied Drax to be just over sixteen, or just on the verge of sixty. I am not exaggerating. How are you to judge of a man's age, when upon his face not a vestige of hirsute adornment is to be seen—when his cheeks are as round and as smooth as apples (apples in wax, before the colouring matter is applied: for Mr. Drax was pale)—when he wears spectacles, and a wig, and a white tie? He had lost all his hair, he said, through a fever in his early youth, and was thus compelled to adopt an artificial coiffure. When occurred the period of that early youth?

Two years ago? Or half a century ago? I must answer, with Montaigne, "*que sçais-je?*" and the inquisitive ladies of Clapham, although their acquaintance with the works of the quaint old essayist may have been but slender, were constrained to give a similar reply to the oft-posed question. There were no actual wrinkles on the Draxian countenance, and the slight puckerings under his eyes and about his mouth might have been the result of arduous study of his art; for, although I have hastily dubbed him apothecary, Parfitt Drax had passed both Hall and College, and was a general practitioner. He wore spectacles, he said, because he was short-sighted; but nobody knew whether his imperfect vision was inborn, or had grown upon him with years. He was too discreet to tell you. If he were, indeed, a profound dissembler and young, his spectacles, his wig, and his white tie, relieved him from that appearance of juvenility which, in discreet boarding-schools, at Clapham and elsewhere, would have been a reproach and a stumbling-block to him. If he were old, his make-up was perfect, and he, or his wig-maker, or his tailor, had triumphed over Time, who ordinarily triumphs over all. The accomplished Madame Rachel, and her more accomplished daughter, with all their Arabian, Indo-Syriac, and Mesopotamian enamels and varnishes, could not have made Drax look more "beautiful for ever" than he looked of himself under the influence of imperturbable discretion, scrupulous cleanliness, a neckerchief of white cambric, a pair of glasses, and a false head of hair. This head, this wig, was in itself an achievement. It was discreet, like its possessor. It showed no tell-tale parting. It was rigid with no unnaturally crisp curls. It was a waving, flowing, reasonably tumbled, human-looking scalp covering, of a discreet mouse colour, that might have begun to turn grey the next moment, or have preserved its natural hue until Drax was gathered to his fathers. It was a wig for any age, or for no age at all.

Drax, I say, wore a white tie; a strictly medical neckband, a consulting neckcloth, a family cravat—symmetrical without being formal—*dégagé* without being careless—tied in a little square bow. Drax wore very large and stiff wristbands, in hue and consistence belonging to the glacial period. They added to his discreet appearance. His right middle finger was adorned with a mourning ring containing a lady's hair, and an indecipherable monogram. The hair was of an ambiguous shade. It might have been that of his deceased wife, or of his sister, or of his sweetheart, or of his grandmother. It formed an additional piece of artillery in his discretionary battery.

Mr. Drax was a frequent visitor at the school, not only in his professional capacity, but as a friend of the family. He was allowed to come as often as he liked, and to supper uninvited. In fact, he "dropped in." But on this particular evening his presence at the usual repast was not due to the immediate exercise of his own personal volition. The Bunycastles had agreed,

early in the afternoon, that Mr. Drax should be invited to supper, and in pursuance of the resolution unanimously arrived at in solemn family council, Miss Barbara Bunnycastle had, in her own exquisite (though somewhat attenuated) Italian hand, written to him, "Dear Mr. Drax, *pray* come to supper, as *soon* after nine as ever you *possibly* can. We want so *very* much to see you, and *consult* with you on a most *particular* and *important* matter." The original under-scorings are Miss Barbara Bunnycastle's, and not mine.

This missive, signed with the initials B. B., and "your *ever* faithfully," and sealed with Barbara's own signet, bearing the charming enough little motto of "Dinna forget," was duly despatched at tea-time by the page and knife-boy (the only male creature, with the exception of the gardener, who came once a week for four hours, forming part of the Rhododendronian retinue) to Mr. Drax's surgery or shop in College-street; and punctually at half-past nine, the discreet apothecary made his appearance in the little back parlour. He had as small an appetite—or, in his discretion, chose to be as abstemious—as the Bunnycastles themselves; and so, after he had consumed a very thin slice of the grinning mutton, and sipped a very small quantity of the table-ale, Miss Adelaide Bunnycastle mixed him, with her own fair hands (never mind if they were slightly bony), a tumbler full of the warm, colourless, but comforting mixture which her mamma was in the habit of imbibing after supper. Then the conversation, which had hitherto been fitful and desultory, became concentrated and engrossing.

"Did you ever hear of such a strange romantic affair?" asked Miss Adelaide.

"Only fancy," Miss Celia continued, "no name given—at least, no real one—no address, no references, but an offer of fifty guineas a year, payable in advance, for a little girl not yet four years of age."

"And such a beautiful spoken gentleman is the dark one," remarked Barbara.

"And so beautifully spoken is the one with the bald head," interposed Adelaide.

"Rubbish, girls," quoth good Mrs. Bunnycastle. "The bald-headed one isn't a gentleman at all. He's the dark one's man-servant."

"He has lovely eyes," pleaded Barbara, "and charming teeth, and an angel smile."

"He wears a diamond ring as big as a four-penny-piece," said the practical Adelaide.

"I tell you he's nothing but the other one's valet. He as much as owned it to me, the last time he was here. But, master or man, it doesn't much matter. Do tell us now, my dear doctor, whether we ought to take this little girl or not?"

All Mr. Drax's discretion was required to enable him to give this interrogation a fitting reply. He stroked his chin with his hands, and crossed the foot of one leg over the knee of the other, his favourite attitude when in profound meditation. Then he softly swayed his discreet head upward and downward, as though he were

weighing the pros and cons of the momentous question. The Bunnycastles regarded him with anxious interest. They had unlimited confidence in his discretion. At last the wise man spake.

"Your usual sums, my dear Mrs. Bunnycastle, are——"

"We say forty, and take thirty, or whatever we can get," the lady superior responded, with a sigh. "Miss Furblow, it is true, pays fifty; but then she's a parlour-boarder, and her father a purse-proud tradesman, with more money than wit."

"Parents are growing stingier and stingier every day," added Adelaide. "They think washing costs nothing, and they won't even pay for a seat at church, or for stationery. That's why we've adopted the viva voce system of instruction, and so saved half the copybooks."

"They have the impudence to come and tell us that there are schools advertised, with unlimited diet, twenty-seven acres of ground, a carriage kept, lectures by university professors, weekly examinations by a clergyman, a drill-sergeant to teach calisthenics, milk from the cow, and all the accomplishments, including the harmonium and the Indian sceptre, for sixteen pounds a year. And no vacations, and the quarter to commence from the day of entrance!"

"I wonder what they feed the children upon?" quotes Miss Barbara, disdainfully: "snips and snails, and puppy-dogs' tails, I should imagine."

"I thank Heaven *we* have never advertised," remarked, with proper pride, Mrs. Bunnycastle. "That degradation has at least been spared the principals of Rhododendron House."

"Which always will continue to be exempt from such a humiliation," Mr. Drax put in, with a decided bow. "Advertising has been overdone, even in the case of patent medicines."

The discreet Drax had committed one indiscretion in the course of his professional career. He had dreamed of a Pill which should eclipse the renown of all other pills, which should be vended by millions of boxes at one shilling and a penny-halfpenny each (government stamp included), and which should realise a rapid and splendid future for himself. Drax's Antiseptic, Antizymotic, Antivascular Herbal Pills were launched, but did not attain success. Either they were not advertised enough, or they were puffed through wrong channels. The pills were a sore point with Drax; and his cellar was full of them. I hope the constitution of the rats benefited by their consumption, and that the old women supplied with the pills at Mr. Drax's gratuitous consultations were likewise the better for them.

"Well, doctor, what do you say?" Miss Adelaide continued.

"Your terms are forty, and you take thirty, making even a further reduction when vacancies are numerous, and an increase in numbers is desirable. You had rather a bad time last quarter but one, when, scarlet fever having broken out, of thirty-eight pupils who were sent home to

escape infection, only twenty-nine returned to resume their studies."

"And then, you know, Mr. Legg, the coal merchant, who had four daughters here with the smallest heads and the largest appetites it is possible to conceive, had the wickedness and dishonesty to go bankrupt, and we never got a penny for two quarters' schooling of the whole four."

"Rent and taxes are heavy; risks are numerous; parents are, as you remark with pardonable severity, stingy; provisions are dear"—thus went on, discreetly pondering aloud, Mr. Drax—"and the fifty guineas are to be paid by half-yearly payments, in advance. Well, dear ladies, I think, if I were you, I should take the little girl."

"So young a child can't eat much," mused Miss Adelaide.

"She won't want any accomplishments yet awhile, and when she does we must ask higher terms."

"And her papa is evidently a gentleman," Miss Barbara added.

"To say nothing of the man-servant with the diamond ring," interposed Adelaide, somewhat maliciously.

"With one so young," wound up Mrs. Bunycastle, with soft didacticism, "on a mind so tender and so plastic, who shall say what durable and valuable impressions may not be made? How many children are treated with harshness and want of consideration; how many have been set down as dunces and idlers, because their natures have not been understood; because their capacities have not been discriminately ascertained; because their susceptibilities have not been worked upon; because the responsive chords in their characters have not been touched by the judicious fingers of kindness and sympathy——"

"There, ma, that will do," Miss Adelaide broke in, with a shake of sadness in her voice; "we're talking business, and don't want extracts from the prospectus at supper-time. The principal stumbling-block to me, dear doctor, is the absence of references. We are, you know, so very exclusive."

Exclusiveness at Rhododendron House meant this—and it has pretty nearly the same significance at five hundred boarding-schools—the Bunycastles had a decided objection to taking any pupils unless they were perfectly certain of punctuality in the receipt of quarterly payments from their relatives or friends.

"Admitting that the want of satisfactory references is a serious impediment," remarked Mr. Drax, with his discreetest smile, "is it an insuperable one?"

"It may have been a love-match," suggested Adelaide.

"Or a scion of nobility," added Celia.

"Or one against whom great machinations have been formed," said Barbara.

"Stuff and nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Bunycastle, with an energy unusual to one of her soft and sentimental nature. "When you've

kept a school as long as I have, girls, you'll know that there are, as the doctor says, hundreds of reasons for putting a little bit of a child away, and leaving her under proper care till she's grown up. I think we're all agreed? The little one is to be taken?"

"Certainly," chorused the three maidens.

"You could not have arrived at a more sagacious decision," acquiesced Mr. Drax.

"But the most embarrassing thing of all is," Miss Adelaide resumed, "that she is to be brought here this very night. We expect her papa every minute. The gentleman with the diamond ring—the man-servant, I mean—said they might be as late as half-past ten. Only fancy a visit, at so late an hour, and from a stranger too, at Rhododendron House! Such a thing has never happened to us since we first came here. And it was principally for that reason, doctor, that we asked you to come. We wished, in case you advised us to take this little thing, to have you here, as a kind of witness, as it were, when her papa brought her."

"Perhaps her papa will object," remarked Barbara.

"To what? To something he can't see any more than the man in the moon can?" retorted her sister, snappishly. "Nothing would be likelier than his objection to a stranger being present if his object is to secure secrecy; but, at the same time, nothing is easier than to avoid the slightest unpleasantness."

"Of course, of course," said the discreet apothecary. "I apprehend your meaning in a moment, my dear young lady. You wish me to be a witness, but an invisible one. You must receive the visitors in the front drawing-room. If you will kindly have the lamp lighted there, and leave me here in darkness (and, he might have added, 'in discretion'), with one of the folding-doors the slightest degree in the world on the jar, I shall be an auditor to all that passes, and you may depend on my adroitness to see as well as hear."

Miss Adelaide Bunycastle clapped her hands in grave applause at the apothecary's suggestion. Celia regarded him with eyes of favour. Barbara smiled upon him. Old Mrs. Bunycastle was just on the point of asking him if he would take just one little drop more of spirits-and-water (although I am certain that Drax, in his discretion, would have refused), when the gate bell was rung, and, a moment afterwards, the sound of carriage-wheels was heard crunching the gravel-walk before Rhododendron House. The ladies hurried into the drawing-room. A solemn lamp with a green shade round it was hastily illumined; and presently Pepper announced that two gentlemen, with a little child, requested an interview with Mrs. and the Miss Bunycastles.

CHAPTER VI. LILY SITS UP LATE.

FRANCIS BLUNT, Esq., sometimes called Frank, but familiarly known as Griffin, entered the scholastic presence with the assured step of one who felt himself among those ready to do him

homage. He was still exquisitely polite—in-deed, courting was second nature to him; but his politeness was the condescension of a sovereign among his subjects—of the Marquis de Carabas among his vassals.

Mr. Blunt had thrown over his attire of the afternoon a long ample cloak of circular cut, deeply faced with velvet, and made of the finest broadcloth. It was called a "Spanish" cloak; and in Spanish I am afraid the eminent Mr. Nugee, the tailor who had made it, was paid. Blunt had long since passed into that state of indebtedness when a man gets credit solely on the strength of his already owing so much.

Close upon his heels, and carrying a slight childish form wrapped up in a cloak, was Mr. Blunt's friend. Yes; he was his friend—his guide and philosopher too, although to the world the relation in which he stood towards the man of fashion was not more exalted than that of a valet de chambre. Mr. Blunt's friend was hero and valet in one, and looked each character equally well.

In his way he was as exquisitely dressed as his master. It is difficult to make anything remarkable out of a full suit of glossy black. You must needs look, in general, either like a waiter, or a doctor, or a schoolmaster, or an undertaker. The friend and valet of Francis Blunt, Esq., did not approach any one of the above-mentioned types of humanity. Mr. Nugee made the coats of the man as well as of the master. The valet's coat was perfection. It wasn't a body-coat, and it wasn't a swallow-tail—nay, nor a frock, nor a surtout, nor a spenser, nor a shooting-jacket. It was a coat with which no one could quarrel. It had the slightest clerical appearance, just tinged with a shade of the sporting cut. There is little need to say anything of the supplementary garments worn by Mr. Blunt's friend. That incomparable coat disarmed all ulterior criticism, and would have compensated for any short-comings in the remainder of the attire. Such short-comings, however, were non-existent. Everything came up to a high standard of excellence. A delicate appreciation of art was shown in the thin brown gaiter with pearl buttons, that showed itself between the termination of the pantaloons and the foot of the varnished boot. A refined spirit of propriety was manifest in the narrow shirt-collar, and the quietly folded scarf of black ribbed silk, fastened with a subdued cameo representing the profile of a Roman emperor. Even that diamond ring to which Miss Bunycastle had called attention, large and evidently valuable as it was, had nothing about it on which the imputation of obtrusiveness or vainglory could be fixed. It was worn on the little finger of the left hand, and rarely brought into play.

It is time to say a few words about the individual for whom a skilful tailor and his own delicacy of taste had done so much. Nature had been partially kind, but, with her usual caprice, here and there hostile, to the individual. He was of the middle size, and clean limbed, but all the powers of the coat were needed—and

they nearly but not entirely succeeded—in disguising the fact that he was so round-shouldered as to be almost humpbacked. Without the coat, he would have been Quasimodo; with the coat, he was only a gentleman who, unfortunately, stooped a good deal. His head was large, but the collar of that invaluable coat was so cut as to make his neck sit well on his torso. His hair was of the deepest raven black—blue in the reflexions indeed—and, had it had its own way, would have grown in wildly tufted luxuriance. But from nape to temples his locks had been shorn to inexorable shortness; yet, close as the scissors had gone, you could tell at a glance that a forest had been there.

In the whole attitude of the man there was repose, concealed strength, abnegation of outward show. Had he given his eyes and lips full play, the expression of his countenance would have been terrible. But, with rare self-denial, he kept his eyelids habitually drawn down, and veiled his great, flashing, devouring orbs with the yellow nimbus round each pupil. In the same spirit of abstinence from show, his lips, naturally full and pulpy, were under inflexible management, and were kept firmly set together. Not half the world knew what large, regular, white teeth he had. He sometimes smiled, but he never bit, in public. There was one concealment he could not, or had not, cared to make. The very large, bushy black eyebrows were untampered with, and notwithstanding the laboured amenity of his physiognomy, gave him a somewhat forbidding look. Add to this that his complexion was dark, but so far removed from sanguineous hues as to be well-nigh sallow, and that on each cheek he wore a short closely-cropped triangular whisker strongly resembling a mutton-cutlet, and you have him complete.

This individual was Monsieur Constant, valet de chambre and confidential factotum to Francis Blunt, Esq., and speaking English fluently and idiomatically. He knew all that his master did; and there were a great many things within his, the servant's ken, of which the master had not the slightest idea. Monsieur Constant said that he was five-and-thirty years of age, bien sonn  , which means that he might have been between five-and-thirty and forty; and there was no reason for disbelieving his statement. Monsieur Constant came from Switzerland—from one of the cantons bordering upon Italy, I should opine, to judge from his swarthy complexion. I believe his christian name was Jean Baptiste. Of his foreign antecedents he was reticent. His English antecedents could be known to all who were at the pains to inquire. They were enrolled in a long catalogue of distinguished service with the British aristocracy. His character, or rather his characters, were stainless. He had been the Marchioness of C  urdisart's courier. He had valeted the Duke of Pam-poster, and attended on his son and heir, the young Marquis of Truffleton, at Oxford, and throughout the grand tour. He had been for a short time groom of the chambers to Lord

Buffborough, when that nobleman was ambassador at Paris. Griffin Blunt had won him from the diplomatic service, and although he lost promotion, if not caste, by the change, the valet clung with strange tenacity to his new master, in whose service he had now been three years. Master and man alike suited each other. Each, perchance, had his own game to play, and played it with tranquil skill. Mr. Blunt declared that his man Constant was unrivalled. "None of your five-act comedy valets," he would say, "but a steady-going, responsible fellow, who knows his business, and goes about it without boring you. He's a proud fellow enough. Sells my old clothes to a Jew, and has his own coats made by my tailor. Never dresses beyond his station, however. He does me credit; and, egad! I fancy he shares in it, though I dare say he's got much more money than I have." I fancy Monsieur Jean Baptiste Constant had.

As for the third person in this group, poor little Lily, the child was placidly slumbering in the folds of the great warm shawl. She had cried herself to sleep in the hackney-coach, and her waking, when the vehicle stopped at Rhododendron House, was but for a moment. Monsieur Jean Baptiste Constant laid her gently down in the state arm-chair, with its elaborately worked anti-macassar: slightly to the horror of Miss Celia Bunycastle, who had never seen a new pupil permitted to occupy that imposing throne of maroon-coloured morocco, and then stood respectfully in the background, a demure smile mantling on his dark face. Adelaide Bunycastle admitted in the inmost recesses of her heart that the scene was eminently romantic. It was like Lara; it was like the Corsair; it was like Thaddeus of Warsaw.

Meanwhile, Mr. Blunt had allowed his mantle to drop gently from his shoulders, and accepted with his gracefulest bow the seat offered him by Mrs. Bunycastle, who had reserved the moreen morocco fauteuil for his reception, but had, in stress of upholstery, been fain to fall back on a high-backed chair of walnut wood. He was overwhelming in compliments and apologies for intruding on the ladies at so unseemly an hour; pleaded stress of business, and an imminent departure for foreign parts.

"Ah! he's been abroad, has he?" mused Mr. Drax, in the dark. "The man-servant's a foreigner too. Let's have another look at him." And in his anxiety to obtain a better view, Mr. Drax, slightly derogating from his reputation for discretion, opened one of the doors yet a little and a little more, till it creaked.

Mr. Blunt started. "What the devil is that noise?" he asked, with an abruptness not precisely in unison with the tone of mellifluous suavity he had adopted a moment before.

Mrs. Bunycastle had no time to be shocked at the irreverence of the stranger's query. She was too much flurried by the creaking of the door, and in a nervous murmur laid the blame of the occurrence on the cat. Mr. Blunt seemed

perfectly satisfied when the grave, respectful voice of Monsieur Constant gave a fresh turn to the conversation.

He had politely declined the seat offered him by the youngest Miss Bunycastle, and remained standing; but now advanced a couple of paces. "Monsieur, whom I have the honour to serve," he said, "has brought the little girl of whom mention has already been made. Monsieur is ready to pay the sum agreed upon, fifty guineas, for one year's board and education, and only requires a little paper of receipt undertaking that no further demand shall be made upon him until a year is past."

"We don't even know the gentleman's name if we made such a demand," Mrs. Bunycastle remarked, with a smile. "But the young lady must be called by some name or other."

"Certainly, certainly," broke in the dandy. "Call her Floris. I'm Mr. Floris."

"Floris; a very pretty name indeed," said Miss Barbara, writing it down on a sheet of paper. "And her christian name?"

The master looked uneasily at the valet. I think he had forgotten his daughter's name.

"Lily," said Monsieur Constant, thus appealed to.

As he spoke, the child woke up from her sleep, and thinking herself called, answered with a sob that she was "vay tyde." The sound of her voice was a signal to the two younger Miss Bunycastlees to hasten to the arm-chair, to unroll the little one from her shawl, to kiss her, and smooth her hair, and fondle her, and go through the remainder of the etiquette invariably observed at Rhododendron House at the reception of a new pupil of tender age. Not that the Miss Bunycastlees were either hypocritical or ill-natured. They were naturally very fond of children, but they saw so many, and so much of them.

The required paper was duly made out, and signed by Mrs. Bunycastle; and Monsieur Constant, advancing to the table, respectfully placed a little wash-leather bag, containing fifty-two pounds, ten, in the hands of the schoolmistress. Nothing loth, Mrs. Bunycastle proceeded to count it; and even the eyes of her two eldest daughters twinkled as the sovereigns gave out their faint "chink, chink." Barbara Bunycastle was insensible to the gold's seductive sound. Her eyes wandered from the master to the valet, and her soul was filled with wonder and admiration for both. It was like the Cottagers of Glenburnie. It was like the Children of the Abbey. It grew more and more romantic every moment.

"There is only one little thing more," said Mrs. Bunycastle, rather hesitatingly. "Has—a—has your—the gentleman (she indicated Monsieur Constant) brought the young lady's boxes?"

"What boxes?" asked the dandy, with a polite stare.

"Her clothes—her linen," explained all the Bunycastle family with one voice.

Francis Blunt, Esq., looked at them, generally,

in blank discomposure. He turned to Monsieur Constant; but that retainer shrugged his shoulders as though it were beyond his province or his power to interfere.

"Confound it!" cried the dandy. "It's very vexatious; but the fact is, we've forgotten the clothes."

"A nice affectionate father," murmured Mr. Drax, in the dark.

The dilemma was perplexing, but not irre-medi-able. Monsieur Constant explained that Monsieur whom he had the honour to serve, had left Mademoiselle's petit trousseau at his hotel in London. Would the ladies undertake to procure clothes for the child, if a sum were left in advance, sufficient for what she might probably require? Mrs. Bunycastle bowed her head in gracious approval of this proposal. What sum would be requisite? Oh! merely a few pounds. The valet whispered the master. The latter, looking anything but pleased, but, from a purse elegantly embroidered with beads and gold thread, took out a couple of crisp five-pound notes, which he handed to Mrs. Bunycastle. Then he rose, suppressing a slight yawn, saying that it was past eleven o'clock, and that he had detained the ladies an uncon-scionably long time.

All the women's garments rustled—for they had dressed themselves in silk attire, in ex-pectation of his visit—as he made his reve-rence of farewell. Mrs. Bunycastle was profuse in her thanks, and protestations of solicitude for Lily's welfare. The young ladies chimed in harmoniously.

"She is to be brought up in the principles of the Church of England?"

"Of course, of course. By all means; eh, Constant?"

Monsieur Constant bowed diplomatically, as though to convey that, professing as he might himself a different creed, he had the profoundest respect for the Church of England, as that of the ladies before him, of Monsieur whom he had the honour to serve, and of the genteel classes generally.

"As her little mind expands," said Mrs. Bunycastle, "no efforts of ours shall be spared, not only to instil into her piety and virtue, but to lay the foundation of clever ornate accom-plishments—"

"Thank you, thank you," Mr. Blunt returned, rather hastily, and cutting short a further instalment of the paraphrased prospectus; "when she's old enough, of course she'll learn French and drawing, and that sort of thing."

"And dancing," suggested the valet, in a low deeply respectful voice.

Mr. Blunt started, as though a wasp had stung him. When he spoke again, there was a strange dry harshness in his voice. "Madam," he said, turning to the schoolmistress with a sternness unwonted in so urbane a gentleman, "I do *not* want my daughter to learn to dance. Mind that, if you please. No dancing for Miss Lily Floris. I have the honour to wish you a very good night."

He was going. He was on the threshold, when Monsieur Constant whispered to him:

"Monsieur has forgotten to bid adieu to la petite."

With his usual charming grace, he im-printed a kiss on Lily's brow. The little one did not heed him. She had fallen asleep again. He turned, bowed, and touched the tips of all the ladies' fingers in succession. He was un-rivalled in the art of touching your hand, with-out shaking it. The women's garments rustled again as they bent in eddying curtsseys. Mon-sieur Constant bestowed a bow on the company, reverential but not servile, as became his degree; and Pepper ushered the two to the door, and they went away.

The first thing the Bunnycastles did when the sound of the hackney-coach wheels had died away, was to bear the lamp and the money into the back parlour, and rejoin the discreet Mr. Drax. Then they proceeded to count the fifty-two sovereigns and a half, all over again. Then they examined the crisp bank-notes, from the medallion of Britannia to the signature of Mr. Henry Hase. Then they turned to the backs of those documents, scanning the much-blotted dorsal scribbles—the worst pens, the worst ink, and the worst pothooks and hangers in the world always seem called into play for the endorsement of bank-notes—and wondered whether "Blogg," who dated from Isleworth, or "Cutchins and Co.," who gave their address in Leather-lane, or "C. J. Gumby," who seemingly resided at Bow, could have anything to do with the mysterious strangers who had just faded away from their ken, leaving a little child, not four years old, a checked woollen shawl, and sixty pounds odd, sterling money of this realm, behind them. They could make nothing of the notes, however, beyond the fact that they were genuine, or of the gold, save that it chinked cheerily, or of either, save that the money looked very nice. Then they drew breath, and interchanged glances of pleasing perplexity.

I think it was Mr. Drax who, with his never-failing discretion, now suggested that it might perhaps be better to put the "new pupil" to bed, as she had come a long way, and must be very tired. Poor little "new pupil!" The Bunnycastles had forgotten all about her. Adelaide acknowledged with a smile that the little body had quite slipped her memory, and, while she rang the bell for Pepper, requested Barbara to fetch the child from the drawing-room.

The child looked up when she was brought into the cozy back parlour, but did not cry. She seemed to be rather relieved by the ab-sence of the two men who had brought her to Rhododendron House. The dandy's resplendent attire and dazzling teeth, and the valet's coat, cameo, and smile, had alike failed in produc-ing a favourable effect on her. On the other hand, while she submitted to be patted on the head by Mrs. Bunycastle, and severely smiled at by

the three young ladies, she took very kindly to Mr. Drax, and, coming toddling towards him, essayed to climb upon his knees, stretching forward one of her plump little hands as though she desired to touch his discreet and mystic neckcloth.

"Ah!" smiled Mr. Drax, as he lifted her up and imprinted a discreet kiss on her forehead, just at the roots of her hair. "She won't be so very fond of me when she has taken half the nasty things I shall be obliged to give her. Poor little thing! I wonder whether she's had the measles?"

He leaned back in his chair and regarded her in fond anticipation, as though mildly gloating over a subject who was to conduce to the enlargement of his professional experience, and in the increase of his quarterly bills. His reverie was put an end to by the arrival of Pepper, who, like a good-natured woman as she was, had in a few moments stroked Lily's brown curls, kissed her on both cheeks, clucked her under the chin, hoisted her up in her arms, and told her half a merry story about a little girl who was always ready to go to bed, and was, in consequence, much beloved by all the angels.

"This is Miss Floris, Miss Lily Floris, Pepper," Mrs. Bunycastle remarked, with calm dignity. "Her papa, who is going abroad, was obliged to bring her very late. What beds are there vacant, Pepper?"

"There's number two, in the first room, mum," answered the domestic.

"Among the elder girls," interposed Adelaide; "that would never do. They never go to sleep until daybreak, I do believe, and they'd question her out of her life before breakfast-time. And Mamselle, though it's her duty not to allow them to talk, is just as bad as they are."

"There's five and nine in the second room; but there's no mattress on five; and as for nine, you know, mum——"

"Well, what do we know?" asked Miss Celia, sharply.

"It's the bed Miss Kitty died in," Pepper returned, with an effort.

There was a prejudice in Rhododendron House against sleeping in the bed that Kitty had died in.

"Stuff and nonsense!" cried Mrs. Bunycastle.

"Well, where *are* we to put her?" Adelaide asked, impatiently. "We can't keep the child up all night."

Lily looked remarkably wide awake, and as though she intended to remain so. She was playing with the ribbons in Pepper's cap, and apparently would not have had the slightest objection to the continuance of that amusement until cockerow. As for Mr. Drax, his discretion stood him in good stead during this essentially domestic conversation, and he feigned to be immersed in the perusal of a volume of the *Missionary Magazine* for 1829.

"Well, if you please, mum," Pepper ventured to represent, "I think that as the dear little

girl's so young, and so tired, and so strange, I'd better take her to bed with me, mum, and then, to-morrow, you know, mum, you can see about it."

The ladies were graciously pleased to accept this suggestion, and it was agreed to *nem. con.* And then—it being now fully half-after eleven o'clock—Lily and her new guardian disappeared, and the discreet Mr. Drax took his leave, promising to call in on the morrow afternoon, in case his advice should be needed.

"A very nice girl is Barbara Bunycastle," said Mr. Drax, softly to himself, as he walked home to College-street. "A very nice girl, and one who would make any man's home happy."

Both Adelaide and Barbara dreamed of Mr. Drax.

"MAKING TEA" IN INDIA.

THE journey from Calcutta to the tea-growing districts of Assam and Cachar, during the dry weather, necessitates a visit to the Soonderbunds—an enormous tract of desolate jungle, stretching from the river Hooghly, on the western side of the Bay of Bengal, to Chittagong, on the east, a distance of upwards of two hundred miles across, and intersected with innumerable narrow streams, the various outlets of the Ganges. This dreary waste of country is the sole and undisputed property of tigers, leopards, and other wild beasts, and is only visited occasionally by a class of natives calling themselves "wood-cutters," who constantly fall victims to these animals.

While steering through these narrow rivulets, herds of deer feeding on the edges of the jungle attracted our attention, the more so as they allowed us to get quite close to them before condescending to take the slightest notice of our steamer. Had we been disposed, we might have shot any number of them, but it being considered unadvisable to stop the course of the vessel, we had sufficient humanity to leave them in peace. We were by no means sorry when we steamed clear of this desolate region, and anchored on the fifth day at Koolneah, the first coaling depôt after leaving Calcutta. The afternoon of the ninth day brought us to Dacca, and here we bade farewell to our steamer, the vessel being ordered to return, and we being instructed to shift for ourselves as we best could until another arrived to take us on to Cachar.

I was not long before I found myself comfortably housed. A letter of introduction in England means a little civility when you deliver your credentials, or, at most, an invitation to dinner, while in India it signifies board, lodging, and every comfort and attention that it is possible to offer. I have reason to speak favourably of Indian hospitality, for I was detained at Dacca upwards of three weeks, and during the whole of that period was entertained by people whom I had never seen before in my life. Much has been written and said concerning the arrogance of Indian officials,

both in their public and private character, but my experience has shown me that no class of men deserve the epithet less. Now that the country is being opened up by railways in every direction, and travelling has become no longer a matter of danger and difficulty, all classes, official and non-official, are compelled to be more cautious concerning whom they invite to take up a residence in their homes; for many cases have occurred of late years, of hospitality having been abused by adventurers, and unlucky hosts sorely victimised.

When the steamer arrived that was to convey us to Cachar, we were by no means pleased to find that she had in tow two large barges, termed "flats," loaded with several hundred Coolies for the tea plantations.

The horrors of a slave ship are familiar enough, and in attempting to describe the position of the poor wretches who were crowded into these barges—men, women, and children indiscriminately—without regard to sex or age, I shall put forward no statement that cannot be substantiated. Soon after we left Dacca, cholera broke out amongst these miserable creatures, and in less than three days we consigned several bodies to the river. It will, perhaps, be as well if I take the reader back to Calcutta, for the purpose of showing how the system of Coolie emigration to the tea districts of Assam and Cachar was carried on only twelve months ago.

The enormous demand for labour in those provinces necessitated the establishment in Calcutta of private emigration agents; and men, women, and children, were contracted for like cattle, at so much per head, the contractors receiving from the tea-planters a certain sum for every individual landed on their plantations, as well as for those who died on the passage. The result of this human traffic was, as might have been expected, an amount of dishonesty and cruelty as disgraceful and repugnant as the African slave trade itself. It was of little consequence to the contractors how many died during the three weeks' passage to Cachar or Assam, since they received so much per head for all those that quitted Calcutta. The result was, that old men and women, whose lives might be reckoned in days, and even hours, the lame, the halt, the blind, and the diseased, were crammed pell-mell into these barges, to infect men, women, and children who, when they left Calcutta, were in the enjoyment of robust health. Previous to embarkation they were collected at certain depôts, where, to use the language of a government official well known and respected throughout India, and who has lately published an interesting work on the cultivation of tea, "these unfortunate creatures were located in places, the pestilential vapours of which, generated by the ordure and filth with which they were filled, were *deadly* to human life. Many contracted the germs of distemper and disease, and in this state were placed in gangs on board boats to be sent to their final destination. Here, crowded and huddled together, and compelled to live in a state of un-

cleanness revolting to human nature, as might be expected cholera and other malignant diseases broke out with fearful effect. In some instances, *ten* per cent of these wretched victims were carried off in as many days. In others, the mortality reached to forty or fifty per cent in a three weeks' voyage."

That there is not the slightest tinge of exaggeration in this description I am confident, for I have by me notes taken during our journey from Dacca to Cachar on board the Thomas Brassey—a voyage which lasted only ten days—and I find not only numerous deaths recorded amongst the Coolies from cholera and other diseases, but also the fact mentioned, that "among the number are several suffering from elephantiasis, three totally blind, others unable to walk except with the aid of crutches, and one who has had his right hand amputated—a valuable addition, certainly, to a tea plantation." It will naturally be asked what becomes of these useless creatures? The reply is, that they are turned adrift to shift for themselves as best they can.

When we landed at Cachar, a dispute arose between some of the planters to whom the Coolies were consigned and the captain of the Thomas Brassey; the planters contending that they had received no advice concerning such a large batch, and refusing to take overcharge of more than the number they supposed themselves entitled to; the captain of the steamer insisting that every man, woman, and child should leave his vessel at once, as he had performed the contract he had undertaken of bringing them to Cachar, and that he would not furnish a meal for them after the anchor had dropped. They were all accordingly landed on the banks of the river. When we left Cachar, a few days afterwards, many of them were still there, without shelter of any description, and would no doubt have starved if it had not been for the kindness of a few government officials, who supplied them with means of subsistence from their own private purses. One would have imagined that owing to the scarcity of labour every Coolie would have been greedily snatched up, and doubtless they would have been if the emaciated countenances and wasted limbs of those that remained had not unmistakably given warning that death had set his seal upon them.

To corroborate what I have stated concerning the transmission of Coolies from Calcutta to the tea-growing districts, I will make a few extracts from a report drawn up by a committee of gentlemen appointed by the Bengal government to inquire into the system.

The opinion at which they arrived was, that "Coolies were shipped in large batches without any arrangement to secure order and cleanliness; that uncooked food was issued without cooks to prepare it; that the medical charge of the Coolies in many cases were left to ignorant Chuprassies, who were entrusted with small supplies of medicine, with the uses of which they were, of course, as ignorant as the men to whom they administered it," and that "labourers

were embarked in some instances almost in a dying state." The committee found that the supply of Coolies was an ordinary commercial transaction between a native contractor and the planter, "all parties considering their duty and responsibility discharged when the living were landed and the cost of the dead adjusted." They also found that "after the Coolies had been inspected by the planter's agent in Calcutta, that feeble and sickly persons were substituted for the healthy men accepted and passed."

It is to be hoped that this state of affairs, discreditable alike to the government and to the planters, has been stopped. There can be no doubt that the Bengal government considered it the duty of those interested in the cultivation of tea, to adopt a systematic and honest course of proceeding in the importation of labour from Calcutta and other parts of India; for Sir John Peter Grant, the late Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, on the 20th January, 1860, wrote: "It is not for the government, but for those immediately interested in the tea plantations of Assam, to apply themselves to this as to other requirements of their position." Hence it is clear that the government considered they had no right to interfere in the matter; but nothing can exonerate them for allowing the emigration system to sink to the level of the African slave trade.

A visit to one of the "smiling tea-gardens" of Cachar I had long looked forward to, and on the day after our arrival in the district, the kindness of one of the planters enabled me to gratify my curiosity. As the country in the immediate vicinity of the station was nearly entirely under water, we started on our elephant for the plantation, and after two hours of jolting arrived at a very comfortably-built bungalow. I was astonished when ushered into its comfortable and elegantly furnished rooms. The walls were covered with valuable prints, the furniture was tastefully arranged, and of the latest pattern; baskets containing exquisite orchids were suspended from the three centre arches which divided the sitting from the dining room; a Broadwood's grand piano and a harp occupied one corner; handsome cases well stocked with books, vases of flowers, and other ornaments one might expect to find in a Belgravian drawing-room, completed the furniture of the apartment.

"I see," said my friend the planter, noticing my look of astonishment, "you expected to find us established in a sort of barn, with nothing but the bare necessities of life around us; but my rule is, wherever I go, to make myself comfortable." And, certainly, things looked like it. Under the circumstances, I felt that the isolation of a tea-planter's life might be made very endurable, though it is right to state that it is not every man who can afford to fare as sumptuously as my friend, or who is blessed with such a helpmate to cheer the monotony of such an existence.

Before sitting down to breakfast, he initiated

me into what he called "the secrets of his den." The den consisted of a room hung round with hunting trophies, spears, guns, sporting prints, and meerschaum pipes. In the centre was an office-table covered with letters and papers; and in front of the window was a most luxurious rocking-sofa. This "den," he informed me, was sacred; no one was allowed to enter it unless by special invitation, except a very large kangaroo dog, who appeared to consider the apartment as much his property as his master's, and who exhibited most disagreeable signs of dissatisfaction at my intrusion.

Breakfast over, we proceeded to visit the gardens, the various workhouses, and the village where the people belonging to the plantation resided. The general appearance of a tea-garden may be described in few words. It is exactly like several acres of gooseberry-bushes laid out in rows, the shrubs planted a few feet apart from each other, and about five feet in height, and from five to six in diameter. The tea-plant, which is indigenous to Assam and the slopes of the Himalayas, is peculiarly hardy, and the higher the altitude at which it grows the more fragrant and delicate its flavour. A rich soil and a humid atmosphere with considerable heat, are conducive to luxuriant crops and a tea of the greatest strength; while a light, though not poor, soil, a temperate climate, and a moderate elevation, are more favourable to average crops of the finest or most delicately-flavoured teas.

The cultivation and general treatment of the plant in India is precisely the same as in China; the government having, in 1842, imported experienced Chinese cultivators, manipulators, and manufacturers, to superintend and teach the various processes. The tea of Assam and Cachar is as good as, if not better than, the ordinary tea exported from China, and is free from the obnoxious colouring matter (indigo, I believe) used by the Chinese for the purpose of making it look inviting when packed for the European market. The tea-gardens are generally formed on undulating country. In Assam and Cachar, owing to the great quantity of rain that falls during the year, they do not require artificial irrigation. In consequence of the extreme moisture of these districts, the produce of tea is more abundant and luxuriant than in any district of the same size in the best parts of China.

From the gardens we went to visit the work-houses and godowns, and found young and old, women and children, engaged in the manipulation and manufacture of the leaves. I cannot describe the various processes from the time the leaf is plucked until it is packed for exportation, and stowed away in large dry godowns to await the arrival of a steamer from Calcutta, as it would occupy too much space, and my object is rather to afford a casual glance at a planter's life and habits, and the estate over which he reigns supreme, than to dive into details of the actual culture and manufacture of the tea-plant.

Having described the system of Coolie emigration, it is only fair to say a few words touching the treatment of the Coolie after he becomes the property of the planter. The word "property" may possibly be objected to as savouring too much of American slavery, but is really the right word to use, for he does become to all intents and purposes the property of the planter, and considers himself so. It is true that he may throw up employment at any moment and take his departure, attended by his wife and family, if he be a married man; but the question is where he can go to. He is in a strange land among a strange people, hundreds of miles from his own home, and without means of transit even if he have the money; and he therefore—very wisely in my opinion—regards himself as part of the property of the estate.

In company with my friend I visited the village, which was within a stone's throw of the bungalow. Anything neater, cleaner, or more comfortable, I never saw in my life. I am aware that the plantation I visited was a model one, and that to the lady, who shared the solitary life of my friend, must be accorded a large share of praise for the admirable way in which everything on the estate was conducted, still I have reason to believe, that, as a rule, the tea-planters are as kind and generous to their dependents as they are hospitable to any Europeans who may casually break in upon their loneliness. The Coolies, and indeed the Europeans both male and female, suffer very much throughout the rainy season from leech-bites. My friend was much amused at the state of nervousness I was in during my visit on account of these troublesome creatures. Being armed with boots up to the thigh, he walked along through the thick jungly grass with impunity: while I, before many minutes, found myself attacked by several leeches that had crawled up my trousers and into my boots, and fastened themselves upon my unlucky legs with a viciousness that was perfectly appalling. No sooner had I dislodged one, than another fixed itself upon me, until, in sheer desperation, I was compelled to seek shelter and protection in a pair of "planter's boots." The bite of a Cachar leech is far from pleasant: it causes inflammation, and a great amount of irritation; and one lady I met, the wife of a planter, was ordered home to England on account of severe illness solely caused by the bites of these creatures.

On my return to the station of Cachar, while crossing a large plain, I was surprised at seeing some forty individuals, Europeans and natives, mounted upon small, stout ponies, and armed with long heavy clubs, apparently engaged in desperate conflict. On inquiring the cause of the affray, I was informed that they were playing hockey: a more novel and dangerous piece of amusement I never witnessed. However, both planters and natives, notwithstanding the hard blows and falls they received, appearing to be enjoying themselves excessively,

in a weak moment I allowed myself to be inveigled into the *mêlée*. I found myself unhorsed before many minutes had elapsed, but, though in the thick of the scrimmage, not one of the ponies injured me with his hoofs: all being taught adroitly to avoid treading upon a fallen opponent. The exercise is very healthy and exciting, but needs considerable practice, pluck, and perseverance. This novel method of playing hockey is a very favourite amusement in Cachar, and the planters assemble from miles round, on certain days, solely for the purpose of joining in it.

The amount of nominal capital represented by the tea companies in Bengal up to last November, according to the Calcutta Money Market Circular, was two million eight hundred thousand pounds, and of this enormous sum two million two hundred thousand pounds had been called for. It is intended that all the capital shall be paid up within a limited period, and the calls are spread over intervals of three months. As might have been foreseen, the Calcutta money market has become seriously affected. The Bank of Bengal raised its rate of interest three per cent within a month, and the current rate, when the last mail left, was twelve per cent; as much as twenty per cent had been paid for accommodations to enable shareholders to meet their calls. This state of the money market is likely to continue until the full amount of substantial capital employed in the cultivation of tea has been provided. Notwithstanding this extreme and sudden pressure, shares in tea companies have not depreciated to any serious extent in Calcutta. A parcel were thrown upon the market and sold to the highest bidder by public auction at fifty per cent premium! This of itself will sufficiently indicate the soundness of this new and wonderful industrial enterprise.

Besides the immense number of companies started within the last five years in India, there are several companies established in London for the same purpose, and the shares in all are a favourable security with the investing public.

When the Honourable Mr. Beadon became governor of Bengal, his first act was to visit the provinces of Assam and Cachar. Addressing the European and native gentry of Dibrrooghur, he said: "It has always been the first aim of the British government, on the occupation of a province, to give security of life and prosperity to all, and to ensure to every man his just rights. These are the very elements of civilisation and prosperity. That in this district the government has been successful in accomplishing this end, is evident from the increase of wealth, revenue, and population; from the clearance of many thousand acres of forest; from the contented appearance of the people; and from the existence of this thriving town and station in a spot where, a few years ago, the voice of man was not heard."

Surely after such words as these, the strangers who are brought hundreds of miles from their

own homes, to assist in developing the resources of this wonderful country of India, may justly look for encouragement and protection.

POINT BLANK.

You complain that I am narrow,
Going straightly to my aim :
Will you quarrel with the arrow
For the same?

Many a bitter word hast thou :
"Pedant," "bigot." Keep thy blame
While that sword, and nail, and plough
Are the same.

I would cleave my world-path cleanly
With an axe, a razor' edge ;
Drive my truth through, not more meanly
Than a wedge.

Far is wide, though force is narrow :
Look straight to thy aim !
Crystal, bud, and flame, and arrow,
Are the same.

THE BLACK ART IN GRUMBLETON.

IN my rural parish of Grumbleton, there are many superstitious usages, politely supposed to be obsolete, but in full force and full swing none the less.

A musty remnant of hard-baked loaf—such a loaf as, when it was new, no baker could have sold, and any beggar to whom it might have been given would have thrown to the rats in the gutter—hangs from the ceiling of one of our "models."

The invalid woman, a very spectre in a shroud of rags and wretchedness, will tell us the use of it. Baked on Good Friday, with a few remarks and mysteries by way of incantation and charm, it is all that remains of "the sovereign cure." At all events, the cure has not been complete in this case. The invalid always feels the better for a little bit of it, but must husband it with great care, because it will be months before Good Friday comes again, and if the charm were eaten up, what help could she have but the doctor's, and the doctor—only look at her—has never done her any good.

Now that confidence is established between us, I hear also of a "sovereign cure" for toothache, which has made Grumbleton almost independent of the dentist. It appears that we have a wise woman among us, who can remove the pain without touching the tooth. The patient goes himself, or, if he is too ill, sends a messenger asking relief. About the time that the messenger finds the witch doctress, and even before he tells her his business, the pain ceases. If the sufferer visits her in person, words as mysterious to him as "*Propria quæ maribus*" are pronounced solemnly, and thrice repeated, after which he experiences the blessing of faith in the black art.

Although the enchantress has great power in

Grumbleton, it is a power not to be obtained or bought by money. Money would kill her charms, and, so I am informed, destroy her power.

While Mr. Home and Mr. Zadkiel possess the confidence of persons belonging to educated classes, and while the law forbids us to call such personages by the little simple name that is their due, there is ground for hope that Grumbleton may become a resort of persons of fashion suffering from toothache, and may grow, thanks to our wise woman, into a Spa that shall make all the dentists grind their teeth to the gums for vexation. And couldn't we bake loaves enough on Good Friday to enable us to dispense with the services of the whole medical profession!

Catkins is now a highly respectable young man, though I have known him to be otherwise. He has a young wife and one child, and lives in another of our "models." The child was lately taken ill, so Catkins tells me, and adds that "no doctors, neither parish nor 'firmary, can cure him."

I answer, that with a mother's care and nursing the child may outgrow the disease.

"There is a quicker way," he replies, mysteriously, "if it warn't for a difficulty we are afraid of."

He is going to take the child some fine morning, before long, at sunrise, to a young ash sapling hard by. The sapling is to be split. The child is to be stripped. Catkins is to be permitted to hold the split parts of the sapling far enough asunder to allow his infant to be passed between them by the wise woman, while she repeats mysterious words, which either he does not know, or he dares not communicate. After this is done, the sapling will be carefully bound together, and its wound will be plastered with mud and clay. If the tree grows, the child certainly recovers; if it dies, or is cut down, the disease returns, and will remain for life. "And here," says Catkins, "is the deuce of it all. All the sticks in these parts is wanted for hop-poles every ten or twelve year, and the cure is never safe, because folks won't let 'em be and grow into timber."

"How can you believe such nonsense, James Catkins?"

"I don't say I do *believe* it exactly; it's a 'speriment. If Polly gets better, I believe it; if the tree lives and she don't, I shouldn't believe it no more nor nothin' at all."

It further appears that Catkins is suffering from a similar complaint, and he has more than half a mind—at all events, his old mother advises him—to undergo the same process, but then he adds, as I turn away in disgust, "it's cutting down them hop-poles that's the mischief of it."

Here, again, is another very respectable tradeswoman, who has lost the middle finger of her right hand. There was a swelling. The medical man wished to remove the top to save the rest, and so she was persuaded to discard the skill of the doctor for the charms of the witch. Notwithstanding fomentations and poultices, which

doubtless did some good, the wise woman in her wisdom condemned the patient to many days and nights of agony, while portions of the bone came away in little white rings. She hadn't enough faith, so they told her, but at last the finger healed with a huge mis-shapen stump, a fitting finger-post of Grumbletonian superstition.

If we are to be told that such cases are failures, and that the patients are worse off than before, the answer is ready—it does as much good as doctoring, while it costs nothing. Medical men cannot tell how cases may go, even when they have unlimited control over them. Why exclude aid so easily attainable, which does not prevent you from using the regular medical or regular quack remedies?

The enchantress, however, does not always come off with flying colours. A case of rheumatic fever did not receive her especial sympathy and help, and the patient was informed that the wise woman had bewitched her. In order to be set free from her "thrall," the daughter of the sick person, watching her opportunity, one day rushed upon the witch and contrived to scratch her with a brass pin from the shoulder to the wrist. By drawing blood, the spell of witchcraft was removed, but, for some other unknown reason, the patient did not live long afterwards.

When anybody's cow is sick in Grumbleton, instead of sending to the veterinary surgeon, we have a charm in a sealed paper from a "great medicine" in an adjoining village. The charm is fastened on the part affected, and if the cow does not recover, she is judged unworthy to live, and is forthwith sent to the butcher.

Such is the state of the art in Grumbleton as regards the health of man and beast, and can we not also boast of an equal power that is exerted on occasion in support of law and order, a power which, fully developed, would do a great deal towards superseding our police. The other day there was a robbery from one of the cottages of a few shillings and a piece of bacon. Recourse was immediately had, not to the nearest policeman, but to the wise woman aforesaid, and with the happiest results, as will immediately appear.

It was quickly circulated throughout the village that the wise woman, on being informed of the case, remarked that she "knew it afore." She knew who was the thief. And here, all Grumbleton trembled; but we breathed freely again on learning that "it was nobody belonging to the parish."

"Would the property be recovered?" was the next question. "That would depend," was the reply, "upon the thief. If he wished the bacon to choke him, or what he had already eaten, as well as the money, to bring upon him a disorder, compared to which Herod's disease was a trifle, he would continue obstinate. But she would consult her oracle, and an answer would then be returned to her, which she would repeat, if permitted." Two or three days were purposely suffered to elapse, and, before they were over,

the owners of the lost property were informed that, on a certain night, it would be restored, and would be found lying on a stone near the cottage. Huge imprecations, however, were denounced, among which blindness by lightning was almost a trifle, so terrible were the conditions of the curse, on all who should dare to be present, or so much as stir out of doors on the evening of the mysterious restitution.

All Grumbleton kept at home that night, nor dared so much as to peep through the keyhole. And it is a fact that the property was safely restored, to the joy of all Grumbleton, and to the great honour and renown of the wise woman thereof.

But, let me do Grumbleton justice. However bad we may be, in some respects, none of us care about ghosts. In this respect, we can bear favourable comparison with any part of England. I have known a stout Yorkshireman not easy in his mind at the thought of passing through a churchyard on his way home at night, lest, as he candidly admitted, the spirits of one or two old fogies he never cared two straws for when in the body, should "play him some unchancy prank now that they had got into free space." I remember a Cumberland minister not proof—good men, I suppose, have their weak points—against horrible anecdotes, current in the neighbourhood, of misfortunes to those who did not make the best of their way, even like Tam O'Shanter, across a bridge some half mile distant; and I know the boys who huddled together under the hedge, and managed some ghostly howls, which by no means retarded his pace as he ran to cross running water. Worthy man, he has no malice in him, for he has had opportunities enough of repaying his tormentors in kind, for it is long since he was gathered to his fathers, and has reached a place, I hope, where nobody is afraid.

Still, in obscure parts of the country, where a railway whistle has never sounded, or the daily press penetrated—terrible foes to ghosts, fairies, and witchcraft, are railways and printing—numberless, still, are the apparitions respectably attested to, and devoutly believed in; so numerous are they, that a solitary ghost is scarce worth mention, where every house, barn, and lane has its tutelary bogie, and where one may see the long funeral procession of headless mourners enter the church-porch, or issue from it, on any more than usually rough winter's night. But pass along our village at night, and you will find indications enough that Grumbleton, though it may—indeed, does—believe in ghosts, doesn't care a rap for any of them.

A story, told of our worthy old rector, Drowse, and never contradicted by him, will show the state of feeling on the subject.

He was out late many years ago, wind howling through the trees, roads heavy with mud and rain, horse tired and rider too, and the night dark as pitch. Although Drowse thought he knew his way pretty well, yet, what with the darkness, and the cross-roads, and the overhanging woods, he missed his road, and as,

by bad luck, the woods ranged on either side for miles, there was a bad prospect before him—one of spending the night in them. At length, there twinkled a light through the trees, and, as he made the best of his way towards it, he saw several more lights, and made out what was, doubtless, a large house full of company, to judge from the blaze of light from the windows as he came into full view. He should, at all events, dismount here, and ask his way. So he led his horse up the avenue, and rang the door-bell. The door immediately opened, and, before he well knew what he was about, as he afterwards said, he had stepped across the threshold. The entrance-hall was large and handsome, with a fine old oak staircase branching right and left, and facing the entrance. The room was hung round with pictures, one or two of the style of Holbein, and some apparently of older date. He found himself, to his surprise, in the presence of some guests of the evening.

It was an abrupt unintentional intrusion, but there was no help for it. A venerable old gentleman, whom Drowse thought at first he had known when he was a boy, but then he recollected that he had been dead for years, stepped forward with the unsurpassed politeness of the gentleman of the old school, and, finding a benighted traveller who had lost his way, at once proffered him hospitality. His horse was taken good care of, the traveller was brushed up a little by a couple of footmen who wore hair-powder, and our good parson was made as presentable as the exigencies of the case permitted.

The company was numerous, and the rector congratulated himself on having fallen into pleasant quarters. Some of the company sang beautiful old English glees and madrigals: "When first I saw your face," "Summer is a-coming in," "Strike it up, neighbour, with pipe and with tabor." "Nice folks, all of 'em," thought Drowse; "how well they sing!" The venerable old gentleman then produced a violin, and played one or two of Corelli's solos, accompanied by his sister, who managed the thorough-bass part beautifully. Very odd it all seemed to Drowse, and beautiful as well as odd. Then followed a prelude and fugue of Bach's, which it would have delighted King Joachim himself to have heard. Then came a dance between two stately old ladies, which was called a Sarabande, followed by another, much more lively and spirited, called Bourrée by the young ones, which was explained to him to be a Provençal dance of the time of René the king. Those who did not care for music and dancing had a round game at cards in the next room, excepting a couple of gentlemen in a corner, who looked, Drowse thought, liked Church dignitaries somewhat out of their element, for they took very little notice of the company. But the great attraction was the music, and if the intruder learned nothing else by his visit, he was charmed with the compositions of the great old song and fiddle masters, and much wondered that he had never heard any of them before.

At last the company began to disperse. A carriage, containing the two sisters who danced the Sarabande, was going his way, he was told, and would pilot him through the wood. On taking leave of his host, he wished to know to whom he had been indebted for so pleasant an evening? The venerable old gentleman smiled and told his name. Drowse started. "The very name and form," he replied, "of an old friend—a great musician, who was very kind to me when I was a boy. But he's been dead for years," he added. The old gentleman smiled again, but made no remark, beyond wishing him a polite and cordial adieu, and the traveller was soon on his way, splashing through the mud after the carriage.

At first the pace was pretty good, but his guides had lights and knew the road, and any way he must keep up with the carriage. In a few seconds, however, he found it well-nigh impossible. The trot became a gallop soon, and Drowse, under the impression that the horses in front of him were running away, and that it was his duty as a clergyman to be in at the death, gave his horse the spur and followed at the top of his speed.

The lights in front bounced up and down, the equipage reeled and staggered as if it would upset every moment, but it didn't upset. Not so the rector. A sudden sharp turn, which the carriage had safely taken, tossed the luckless clergyman over his horse's head. How long he remained in this state, stunned, as he described it, by the fall, he never knew; but when he came to himself he was lying on the ground in the thicket, and the horse was standing quietly beside him.

In the midst of his perplexity, wondering what would become of him, and shivering with cold, for he was wet through, he heard the stroke of twelve from a church tower. This proved his rescue, for by the tone of the bell he recognised his whereabouts. So he made his way to the neighbouring church, which was the means of setting him all right, as a church ought to be.

Some stupid people said that our old friend fell asleep on horseback, tumbled off, and dreamed the story. As he comes of a sleepy family, there was, perhaps, some likelihood in the surmise. But Drowse declared he didn't, and adds that he never dreamt anything in his life, except the night before his wedding, when he dreamed he had lost the ring at the moment it was wanted. Anyway, it is firmly believed in Grumbleton to this day that he spent the evening with a party of ghosts, who were not only innocent and harmless, but hospitable and accomplished. Circumstances certainly give much force to this popular belief, among which is the fact that he has never since been able to find that house, or met with any of the guests.

Dreams have a good number of believers among us, but dreams are on a better footing than superstitions. That the mind should continue the exercise of its faculties while its tenement of clay lies inert and motionless, is

no new theory. The belief that thoughts may pass through the mind in one's sleep, and be even of after-use when the memory has retained them, has nothing, I should think, of the supernatural in it, however singular and interesting it may be. When both body and soul are at work together, how many contingencies are speculated upon as likely to happen, some of which, in the course of events, do come to pass. Once concede that the mind does not always take its complete repose when the body does, and we have a clue to some wonderful things foretold in dreams. But, as Drowse says, whether in men or dogs there must be brains, or there is little chance for the imagination to work, either asleep or awake; and I partly believe him.

A few more superstitions have not much mischief in them. We tin-kettle our bees. We think it unlucky to upset the salt; lucky to find a horseshoe; and those Grumbletonians who are particular about their nails—but the number is very small—will on no account pare them on a Friday.

Still a few defensive charms may be mentioned. On each side of the stable-door, on the first of May, is hung up a birch bough, to keep witchcraft from the horses. It is occasionally a bough of maple instead of birch.

Old Christmas-day is most scrupulously kept among us. Horses must not be worked on that day, nor must women go out of doors. We kill our pigs at the full moon; then the bacon "plums up," so says Grumbleton, and is lucky. It is lucky also for the heir who inherits from one dying at full moon; his estate then, like the bacon, "plums up." If death occurs when the moon is waning, the fortune will injure its inheritor. No instance is, however, on record of an estate being refused because it fell to a man under such malign lunar influences, though its worse than worthlessness is as well authenticated as the belief that bacon will not cure if the pig is killed after full moon. One instance, rather descriptive of the nature of the viper than adding much to Grumbleton superstition, may be subjoined.

Two or three country fellows intently examining a viper, cut in two by the scythe of the mower.

"Can't read that 'ere," says one.

"Knows the English of it, anyway," says another.

"What's the matter, my lads?"

I hereupon am informed that the mottled part of the dying reptile consists of writing in an unknown tongue.

The translation is known to my informant, and is as follows:

If I could hear as well as see,
No man or beast should pass by me.

Now comes the question, what harm is there in all this strong popular belief? "Superstition, and acts of superstition, cannot elevate, but debase the mind." So said the good Dr.

Arnold. The remark is just, and it is one that others beside Grumbletonians might not be worse for remembering.

It is a singular fact, and one which, in this great educational period, is worth attention, that our rural poor are not more enlightened than the parishioners of Selborne were in Gilbert White's time, a century ago. In White's chapter of the Superstitions of Selborne may be found an instance nearly identical with that furnished by Catkins in this year of grace 1864. The only differences between the two cases are, that the incantation is performed at sunset instead of sunrise, and that there is no mention of witches or hop-poles.

Nor are our peasantry better than their fathers with regard to superstitious actions. But for the strong arm of the law, the land would be full of them. A poor deaf and dumb Frenchman, who had taken refuge in a country village in Essex, was but recently done to death by the process of swimming him for a vizard. The poor creature kissed the hand of one who would have saved him, but could not. It was the only sign of gratitude in his power to make. It was the mute appeal for the help of a fellow-mortal at the mercy of a brutal mob. The appeal made in an enlightened age and country proved ineffectual, and ignorance and brutality destroyed their victim.

Acts of superstition, even when apparently of small importance, whether fashionable or unfashionable, should be scorned and rejected on the ground of their debasing influence. May-fair, just now, cannot afford to sneer at Grumbleton.

HOME DINNERS.

At the head of the table of the arts and sciences, let us place with becoming dignity, the science or the art of social dining. Theoretical and practical text-books issue every month from the press for the use of students, but the study itself wants a name as great as its importance. The Greeks, who took the chief meal of their day at our now customary evening dinner-hour, gave it the most dignified of names, as "to Ariston"—the Best. Whoever prepared dinner was said in their language to Do his Best. Whoever received another to dinner was said to aristize, or make-the-best-of him. Dinner-time was the Best Hour, and a dinner companion was synaristos, a fellow-at-the-Best. So let us, if we want a long word, give to the science of fellowship in dining all the dignity of six-syllabled Greek, and call it Synaristology. Gastronomy, which is, by interpretation, paunch-law, looks no further than the pots and Kettles, and we are a long way ahead of Epicurus. Synaristology is the art of comradeship in the best meal, by making the best of one's self, the best of one's friends, and the best of one's victuals.

Let us understand clearly, too, that this is an universal science, or at best a science common to all men who have bread to break. Let us

scout and despise the miserable notion of one fixed exalted form of conventional dinner-party, to which all must yield themselves, or resign hope that they may ever dare to divide mutton with a friend. It is a deadly heresy that has been on the increase of late, and has been setting up the conventional for the real standard of hospitality in house after house. The result is, that at this day many a genial man of moderate income, who is at once sensible and sensitive, will not attempt to do what he cannot do well; and because he dares not defy the conventional heresies, does violence to his inclinations, and asks to his house no dinner-guests but those who are content to share his customary meal. Other men, equally genial but less sensitive, do not flinch from the dinner of compromises with which English society is too familiar. They ask their friends to swallow the greengrocer-butler, the cheap wines of an expensive sort, the ill-made sauces, and the lukewarm entremets with ambitious names: lumps of spoilt food horribly unlike anything that a sane man with a healthy stomach would, of his own free choice, on any day of the year, sit down to eat. Enough of this. Let us be sociable, let us be liberally festive, but let us be honest withal, and let each man give in his own way, and according to his taste and means, his own best welcome to his friend.

Dr. Johnson was sound in his distinction when he said of a dinner he had eaten that it was "a good dinner enough, but not a dinner to ask a man to," but the vulgarly polite interpretation of "a dinner to ask a man to" is not at all sound. Let us see how this is. Aristology, or the science of Dinner-fellowship, sets out, as we have said, with the three postulates, that it calls on a man to make the best of himself, and of his friends, and of his victuals. In a conventional dinner, even where the victuals are of the best, the third of these conditions has not been fulfilled. The mind of the host is not in the feast he has spread. If the courtesy also be formal, or if the show of cordiality towards only one guest be insincere, if there be one man with his legs under the mahogany whose presence is not really wanted, but who has been asked to dinner by reason of some conventional sense of necessity, then we say of such a banquet, let the cooks who made it, eat it. There is a fly in the pot. The dinner stinks, and we will none of it. It is true that there are some of us so unhappily situated that we think ourselves obliged, and perhaps are obliged, to ask people whom we do not care for to formal dinners. For such conventional guests the conventional is the fit form of dinner. The virtualising of these discordant guests is like buying or selling on 'Change—a pure matter of business; and as stockbrokers, merchants, and tradesmen formalise all methods of business transaction because they find it convenient in commerce to hide their individualities behind phrases appointed to express all customary wants and relations of their business life, so may we formalise our dinners whenever they are mere

matters of debtor and creditor account, as now and then they must be. But as the merchant when he converses with his private friends drops the style of his business intercourse, so should the host, when he is at home with his true friends about him, abjure the vain repetitions of the heathen, and delight to give a dinner *like himself*. For, we may reckon it the first great law in Synaristology that the dinner itself should be honestly individual. The perfect host is bound to put his mind into it, and make it accord in the best manner with his means, his taste, or any special opportunity he may have of setting forth in the most pleasant manner, one, or a few, or many, of the meats and drinks that are best after their kind. Let us give to the right form of English social dinner a right English name, and call it a Home Dinner. By asking a man to a family dinner, it is understood already that we ask him to share the ordinary dinner of the household. The conventional dinner-party that we know too well, let us leave henceforth to the uses it will always have in the mere commerce of society. But let us mean by a Home Dinner, a domestic festival for those whom the host knows, or desires to know, as his real friends or well-liked acquaintances, and in whose company he means to make the best of himself, of them, and of his victuals.

He will not make the best of himself if his dinner be in any way a sham. He must fairly and fearlessly proportion its cost to his means. This he must not do as one who pinches himself and his household in private that once a year, or oftener, by a strained effort that gives pleasure to nobody, he may afford to make his dinner-table a coarse imitation of the table of a duke; his board must be spread as that of one who likes often to see his best friends about him, and who, without discomfort to himself, knows how, whenever they come, to entertain them well. The scale of the Home Dinner being, then, in the first place, honestly proportioned to the income of the host and his resources, the indispensable condition of its plan is that everything of which it consists shall be of its kind the best. If the best quality of costly wines be too expensive, then those wines must not have their names taken in vain at the Home Dinner. There are wholesome and excellent wines of less cost, and of one or two of these the best quality should very carefully be chosen. If possible, let there be no mutton but four year old, no beef but Highland bred. In short, the Home Dinner is to mean, whatever its degree of costliness, a sincere welcome, hearty intercourse, and meats and drinks, however modest their character and small their variety, pleasantly set forth, each the best after its kind. Let all assent to this, and there is an end to a legion of social nuisances.

As the world now runs, friendship, based upon like-mindedness rather than upon like-moneyedness, is constantly arising between men of very different degrees of income. Tomkins has two, three, four, five, six, seven, or eight hundred a year and a family; Wilkins has fifteen hundred

a year and no family. T. and W. are firm friends. T. may dine with W., but looks in vain for the great satisfaction of seeing his friend W.'s toes on his own fender. For if T. of the seven or eight hundred should ask W. to dinner, W.'s reflection is: "I like T., but I do not like bad melted butter. He will give me the conventional thing as a mess; I shall be delivered into the hands of a second-rate pastry-cook, and dosed by the greengrocer with Moët at forty shillings a dozen. I have a heart, but I have also a stomach." Let him be sure that the difference of means will appear only in the honest shape of a simpler dinner, involving no costly strain after the unattainable, but nevertheless perfect after its kind, and Wilkins, glad to dine with his friend Tomkins, may find that he dines better with him than even at the costly banquets of his Grace the Bishop of Rypohagon.

One difficulty only stands in the way of a triumphant success for this Home Dinner system. The master and the mistress of a house may have gathered flowers to adorn their feast, have been at pains to select the choicest of its kind for the material of every dish, but how are they to secure all against the mishap of a dirty saucepan, the stupidity or inattention of a cook who has no soul for the delicacies of her art? It is true that the Home Dinner system, even when it breaks down, is an abated evil, for where the cook is not faithful over a few things, how shall she be faithful over many? Where the principle of action is to work within limits proportioned to the resources of the house and its master for the utmost attainable perfection of result, the cook whose energies are not unreasonably taxed is put upon her mettle, and if she be made of ordinary flesh and blood, the very best work of which she is capable will be got out of her. Bad is usually the best if she be let alone; for the cook, even when she has been taught by practice to reproduce a certain number of preparations of food without spoiling them very much, and writes herself "thorough good" in the advertisements, has not been trained to think, and is ignorant of the first principles of what is, in fact, a strictly intellectual employment. Before we can reform our cooks, we must reform a million or two of our mistresses, and restore among them the old genius for household government in all its branches. It is because the natural queen of the household has either dropped the reins of its government, or become lax of rule, that servants now-a-days claim absence of oversight as if it were their right, and resent any gentle attempt that may be made to "teach them their business." It concerns a great many higher things than the production of good dinners that this should not be so. No degree whatever of rank or wealth should be held to release the mistress of a household from fulfilment of the duties of her government. The nobler the lady, the more elevating should be the contact with her mind, which is the just right of all who form part of her household.

Something of this is at the root of the argument of an enthusiastic gentleman who has a strong way of speaking wholesome truths, and who has written a couple of warm-blooded little books, entitled "The Gentlewoman," and "Dinners and Dinner Parties" (published by Messrs. Chapman and Hall). The Registrar-General, he says, tells us that only one woman in twelve, and only one man in five, dies leaving property, and what is left, except the great wealth of a few, is of small average amount. Nevertheless, upwards of twenty millions of money are annually wasted in this country, through want of a proper knowledge of the way to deal with food. Our royal princesses have received lessons in model kitchens, have been taught to weigh out stores, and even to make bread and churn butter. Many ladies of the English nobility, and more on the Continent, have maintained the old custom of attending personally to the superintendence of their household, and such ladies inspire with their intelligence the action of their cooks. In Canada the ladies play, and sing, dance, ride, skate, often are well read and good linguists, while they know at the same time how to make good bread, and cakes, and jellies, and how to rear poultry. Consequently, they give to home more of the cheer of order and nicety, with the help of a single servant girl, than one is accustomed to find in the household of an English couple with three servants. At Xeres de la Frontera, the author of this plea for a graceful homeliness among the English gentlewomen of all classes, dined with a Spanish grandee, whose wife showed him with pride the light luxurious kitchen in which she herself had attended not only to the direction but also to the manipulation of the dinner, and, he adds, "it *was* a dinner." The gentlewoman who adds to her accomplishment a first-rate knowledge and tact in the direction of the duties of the kitchen is mistress, he says, not quite untruly, of an art equal to that of the physician; "a noble art it is; it is a sweetener of temper, it is the sweetener of life, it prolongs life. It is a far nobler art to be able to prepare that which shall agree with the delicate organisation of the human frame, than the art which is employed to get rid of the injurious effects of bad cooking." If you mix dirt with your coal you dull the fire in your grate, and if you mix dirt with your food you dull, says this apostle of clean ladylike cookery, the fire of life within your bodies, or those of your friends. Of course, then, we have here a writer who agrees with us thoroughly in deprecation of dinners that, by help of a pastrycook, affect magnificence beyond the giver's means. "No, no," he cries, "there is no dinner like an honest dinner for a party of eight or twelve out of a model kitchen—it is enjoyment instead of burlesque, it is friendship instead of deceit."

And the model kitchen is an economy, not an extravagance, for in the long run cleanliness is always cheaper than dirt. The poor gentleman whose wife is skilled in household duty will make every scrap of food pleasant and whole-

some. "She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her."

The model kitchen, described by the author of these little books, needs no immense range, devouring tons upon tons of coal. In it, a good dinner is cooked to the moment, at the cost of a few pence for fuel. It is established in any small room, handy to the dining-room; that room, for example, which a doctor, if he occupied the house, would make his surgery; and everything it contains is absolutely clean. The very cloths used in it are washed at home in clean water, with soda only, and without contact with yellow soap. The stewpans are bright; the dozen saucepans of each required size, from the butter saucepan to that which is large enough to simmer an aitchbone of beef, are of fireproof porcelain; and cookery is achieved also in porcelain dishes that come, with their contents uncooled, direct to the dinner-table. There is in one corner of this kitchen, a china sink large enough to soak a ham, with water laid on, and a tap to let it off. Where gas cannot be had, the American stove is used; but in towns where gas is laid on, the model cooking stove should be a gas stove, to which the heat can be applied and regulated at discretion, without waste, with but slight increase of the temperature of the room, and—not the least consideration—with the utmost possible saving of waste in the meat. In such a home-kitchen, under the skilled care of a lady, the cold mutton reappears as a delicacy, piping hot; and the simple dinner of beefsteak and summer cabbage is set on the table of the thrifty, cooked to perfection, and so hot that a cold plate is almost welcome. Let not the housewife take fright at the mention of porcelain dishes and saucepans. Such cooking utensils are now made at Dresden, and used very generally on the Continent. They will not, it is true, bear any kitchen-maid's rough battering about; but used by gentlewomen and by well-trained handmaids, they may last for ever, while the use of them gets rid of all the labour and dirt of imperfect pot-scouring.

There can be no doubt that the use of ladies' kitchens, each fitted with an American or gas-stove, and furnished upon some such plan as this, would, in the first place, tend greatly to the promotion of frugality, and to the bettering of cooks. The mistress of the household would not only teach by precept and example, but would excite curiosity and emulation. Her little laboratory would be a school of nicety and cleanliness, and the whole house would reap the benefit of its teachings: while no cook could stand long in defence of the old ground of ignorant and negligent routine in face of the results she would be seeing constantly produced by the application of a little study and care to her art. And there can be no doubt that, in the second place, where the mistress thus skilfully gives her mind to the entertainment of her guests,

and is not ashamed of her personal interest in the results of her own foresight, but, on the contrary, is proud to have it known that this or that well-contrived dish has been the work of her own hands, the Home Dinner is most surely to be enjoyed in its perfection. Such a mistress is usually the one who can make the piano sing, while her neighbour, who is ashamed of household duty, only beats and tortures it. It is the thorough housewife who, at the head of the table which her skill has furnished with the best of fare, knows how to bring a cheerful heart and a sound cultivated intellect to the elevation of the table-talk about her: while her neighbour, who is ashamed to be thought capable, and is grossly incapable, of household duty, can only produce minced common-places upon the emptiest topics that happen to be accounted fashionable by the politer sort of adde-pates.

Away, then, we say again, with the whole greasy indigestible sham of conventional dinner-parties, aping a style inconsistent with the natural means of the giver. Let us substitute for it the Home Dinner everywhere, honest and characteristic. Who would not exchange a pretentious mess, diluted with counterfeit wines, for a hot well-cooked chop, a mealy potato, and a glass of Bass or Allsopp? Let the Home Dinner, of course, so far exceed the daily fare of the house giving it, as to express with a right generosity the hospitable mind. But while the material expenditure is held modestly within its just and honest bounds, let the expenditure of thought be without stint. If ladies studied cookery as their foremothers did, there would be no house without its individual recipes and original dishes. Some housewives would be famous for one thing, some for another, and the plague of sameness would soon vanish from our entertainments.

What constant variety may, without extravagance, be introduced into the ordinary meals of a household, is partly shown in a capital new housekeeper's book called Cre-fydd's Family Fare. It gives a range of varying breakfasts and dinners for every day in the year, and adds a store of recipes to show how everything that is mentioned is to be prepared. Such a book would carry any housewife, resolved to become pleasantly skilled, as she ought to be, in culinary lore, far on her way. But the great end for her to achieve, is such an acquaintance with principles, and such familiarity with the best-known combinations in the cookery of food, as will enable her to run alone. Her aim should be to work as the skilled physician works when he has gone through hospital training, by individual tact and intelligence applied to every case. Let it be her ambition to find three hundred and sixty-five ways of treating a rumpsteak, all of them better than the simple use of the gridiron. For, if she can do that, she will deserve to have her name inscribed by that of Shakespeare, and to have some day her tercentenary kept with a great Home Dinner, to which all England shall sit down without quarrelling, everything set forth

being of the best, and everybody at the great round table making the best—for a wonder—of himself and of his neighbour.

FARMING BY STEAM.

By the help of railways, the callings of the farmer and the merchant, in districts within easy reach of some of the great towns, are now united. This fact is beginning to tell hard on some of the tenant-farmers who depend entirely on the produce of their lands for livelihood. The losses and crosses incidental to the farm are borne by the merchant-farmer with a resignation not common among country people. He has seen, in the oscillations of commerce, larger sums lost or won by a single stroke, than his crop and stock could make in a whole year; so he has learnt to take his rebuffs quietly. At the same time, he is keen at a bargain, and there is no waste allowed on his establishment. When he has reckoned up the amount to be provided for rent; his rent-charge commutation in lieu of tithes; his land tax, poor rates, bad hay, mouldy grain, diseased cattle—and a dozen obstinate and ugly facts which could be so dwelt upon as to make the old original British farmer a prophet of woe in the market-place for fifty-two weeks every year—this new farmer consoles himself, when a few hundreds are on the wrong side of his farm accounts, with the reflection that they only represent the cost of relaxation from the cares of business. Therefore he will go on selling his bacon at sixpence when it cost him a shilling a pound, and butter at fourteenpence which a careful calculation proves to have cost him half-a-crown. His chickens, ducks, and turkeys, are almost a success. He can rear them within a trifle of what he could buy them for in the meat market, after he has had the pleasure of seeing them run about, and of hearing them cackle and crow "extra parliamentary utterances."

Wherever such men bring their wealth into the farmer's neighbourhood, the farmer who is dependent on his land for bread cannot sustain their competition. Whatever may be the ultimate tendency of this disturbing influence on agriculture, its earlier results do not at present tend to improve the position of the poorer class of farmers.

But skill and enterprise are now brought into action by our merchant-agriculturists. They will have the best machinery; and, though a good many implements prove useless, they bear the expense of practical trial; poorer men wait and learn from them when the inventor's effort really produces a saving of time, labour, and outlay. It would be idle now to speak of steam as an experiment, when all the men who are at the head of their profession look on it as indispensable upon the farm. It makes its way quietly but surely. The old plough, that lazily scratched its one furrow, is given up for an implement which passes briskly over the ground, and turns up in its progress three furrows, or even more, at every passage. The wheat,

barley, beans, peas, and oats, are expeditiously thrashed out on a fine autumn day according to demand, and there is no more flail work, however handy the flail may have been of old as occupation for the men in wet and boisterous weather. With influences of this kind, the education and manners of the tenantry have really kept pace. Some time ago a shrewd writer spoke of such farmers as men to whom their grandfathers would have taken off their hats; and no one who remembers some of their grandfathers, and has visited the Royal Agricultural Society's show-yard, or meetings of the local associations, or the corn and cattle markets in our better-farmed districts, will dispute the truth of such a saying. That many are still lagging behind their day is true of every class of men.

The present tendency of farming is, however, to the use of capital upon large farms. Many small farmers must be, sooner or later, driven from the field. The change may be, and should be, slow. Already some landowners who have numerous small farms appear to be expecting and endeavouring to defer the full accomplishment of such a change. At an important county meeting recently held in the north of England, it was suggested that a certain number of tenants should unite and form a company for purchase and use of steam machinery. The plan remains to be tried, and is open to criticism. Given any ten men with small holdings and a steam-engine for their common use: each farmer will want to thrash his grain so as to sell to the best advantage, even if he resign the use of the steam-engine on other occasions to his neighbour. On arable land the cleverest and most enterprising man of the ten will win. He will with equal conditions out-general the nine, buy their machinery, and rent their land. The remains of the company will descend a step in the social ladder, and become in name what they are now in fact—farm labourers. The practice of hiring machinery by the job is common in some counties, but the farmer in that case seldom has the use of it on the days most convenient and profitable to himself. The capitalist who owns the steam power, and land enough to keep it well employed, has still the larger and the surer profits.

On dairy farms, where wife and family assist in the care and management of three or four cows, or even on fruit lands, where the same help is available, the conditions of a livelihood may remain much as they are at present. At all events, changes in store for them are too remote to need present attention.

One chief occupation for many of the small tenant-farmers who are now, it is to be feared, being forced into a false position by the new agents at work on the farm, will be that of farm bailiffs. Such men are conversant with practical details, and trustworthy. It is true that men are born to a wholesome discipline of trouble, and must find their level in the world in the natural progress of affairs. But it is most honourable of those landowners who would devise some means for protecting families, long

settled on their estates, from hurt by changes which, however inevitable, it is the duty of all to make, as far as possible, simply beneficent. If there be truth in this belief, then the new ways opened to improvement of the position of farm labourers will be found worthy of special and generous consideration. These useful members of the community will be more than ever a class by themselves, and as the work will, therefore, be better done, the country will, under the known principle of "each man to his trade," become the gainer. The farm labourer has, indeed, means of raising his position above the point he has hitherto attained. The difficulty is to convince him of it, and make him his own friend. Assistance may be afforded him, information may be offered, good legislation may be substituted for that which appears unsound; but, after all, we cannot compel him to better himself any more than he can force his horses to drink after taking them to water. Let us give him all fair means of bettering his lot. And let us keep the stream of his life pure as we may.

Whatever be the difference of wages to farm labourers—and the range is considerable—the average payment throughout the country is, we are told, eleven-and-fourpence a week. An industrious man, in good health, can, with the help of his household, earn enough honestly to maintain himself, his wife, and family, with much about the same struggle in one part of England as another. Therefore, we need not go into any question of comparison of those who have cheap fuel, gardens, low rent, permission to keep a pig, and nine shillings a week wages, with others who live in expensive districts where every perch of land is wanted by a farmer, paying nearly double the amount in cash wages, but adding to them few perquisites or pickings.

Neither is the average day's work of ten hours too much for an able-bodied countryman. It may be noted that the steam-engine compels a fair day's work for a fair day's wages, and the reaping-machine has done much to discourage strikes for increase of wages among the reapers, at the critical juncture of a ripe crop and a sunny morning. Generally, also, now that prejudice is adjusting itself to the new phase of farming life, there is a better and more social feeling between the workmen on the farm, which is a pleasure and a gain to men and masters.

But what we said years since of the unfenced factory machinery, it is to a certain degree necessary to repeat of the use of steam-engines among the farmers. Enough has not yet been done to secure farm labourers against accidents arising from machinery. So long ago as the meeting of the Royal Agricultural Society at Chester, in 1858, the danger was thus pointed out in the judges' report in a rather alarming manner:

"On entering the show-yard at Chester, the visitor's direct path to the stock and implements lay through an avenue of steam-engines, neatly arranged at equal distances, their fly-wheels in (perpetual) motion, presenting a very animated

scene; but what would have been the effect produced on the visitor's nerves had he known that three of these engines were liable to burst at any moment? It is hardly necessary to say that the stewards, on being informed by one of the judges of this serious fact, immediately ordered their fires to be extinguished; and the police had strict injunctions to remove any man from the show-yard who should attempt to get steam up in a dangerous engine."

There may have been reasons for limiting the action of the Society to protecting visitors to its own show-yard, but a danger to the farm labourer, thus deliberately foreshadowed, ought surely to have been met and averted. Yet no legislative interference appears to have been attempted, and that which was threatened has come to pass.

In the course of the recent harvest, fatal accidents have occurred by the bursting of such engines. In one case, at Plaxtol, in Kent, where a life was lost, skilled evidence was given before the coroner, to the effect that the plate which burst was "decomposed generally."

Another fatal accident, in which two lives were lost, happened from the same cause at Clearfield, in Suffolk. The agricultural society of the county has in consequence, it is said, passed a resolution under which the association recommends the appointment of a competent engineer as "inspector of such motors." The inspection is proposed to be made at least half-yearly, at a certain fixed payment per engine, to be shared between the owners and the society. The inspector is further to examine every "engine driver" as to his fitness, and will certify his fitness, and authorise him to wear a badge in testimony of the same when at work.

The danger of bursting is certainly not likely to decrease as such machines become old; and, unless measures of precaution be taken before next harvest, we may fairly expect a further waste of human life. The recommendation of the Kentish jury is surely worth the attention of parliament. Why should it not be made somebody's duty to provide generally that security which the county of Suffolk is already striving to obtain for her own farm labourers?

Engine-driving, as it is called, would thus become, as it should be, a distinct occupation, by which a higher rate of pay in one new occupation for the better class of farm labourer would be obtained. But it is a notorious evil, that a common farm labourer, who knows no more of the steam-engine than he does of logarithms, should be entrusted with its management. Such men are painstaking, and with instruction would, no doubt, qualify themselves for the duty. We asked one of them recently why he was not at work on the engine? His reply was: "Well, sir, I thought she was getting very old, and, if she blowed up, my Reputation would be blowed up with her"—he did not think about his life—"so I came along home."

The class of accidents on farms is fast coming to resemble those in mills: loss of fingers or

toes, or haply an arm, by the machine. If we enter a shed of one of the Society's shows, where the engines are at play, and the different machinery now introduced on farms is on the whirl, the wonder is that accidents are not more common.

ON FIRE!

THE recent terrible catastrophe in Santiago recalls vividly to my mind one of the most extraordinary adventures of my chequered life.

Five-and-twenty years ago, I was captain of the Northern Light, a large schooner trading between Hull and St. Petersburg. A long acquaintance with the vicissitudes of the Russian climate had made me somewhat reckless. The consequence was, that one 30th of October I found my vessel tight locked in ice. I had stayed a week too long, in my eagerness to take a full cargo of timber, and I was justly punished for my temerity: a prisoner till the middle or end of April, far away from my friends, and doing what a livery-stable-keeper would call "eating my own head off."

Being, however, of a sanguine temperament, and having no wife at home to be anxious about, I resolved to make the best of it, and enjoy myself as well as I could. I saw all the sights of St. Petersburg, from Peter the Great's wooden house down to the Mammoth. I visited Moscow. I went bear-hunting. I drove about in sledges. I fell in love and fell out again. Nor did I neglect business. I frequently attended the Exchange, and made myself known to the chief tallow, hemp, and timber merchants. I studied Russian commerce. I arranged for cargoes for two years to come. The Anglo-Russians are very hospitable, and, thanks to the kindness of Mr. Anderson, the English banker, my hotel expenses were very small. My fur coats were my chief expense; they cost me a large sum then; but I reckoned that they would last me my life, and so they have—at least, I wear them to this day.

Nevertheless, I pined for the hour of liberty. An idle life did not suit a man of my temperament—one who had been at sea ever since he was twelve years old. Like all sailors, I was always grumbling against the sea, and yet I was never happy away from it. At last the order of my release came. The ice on the Neva, opposite the Custom-house especially, began to melt into thin bars an inch or so wide. It became dangerous to venture on it, except where it was piled with snow. The ice-slabs on the quay began to break, when I pushed them with my stick, into glassy fragments. Here and there some spaces began to open, and dirty brown snow water pooled on the surface. There had been several warm days, but now rain and wind came, and they soon melted the walls of my crystal prison. Sledges still ventured on the Neva, though the water rose up to the horses' knees.

One morning, when I looked out of my window on the ground floor at Miss Benson's, on the English quay, the water had all gone from the surface of the ice; that was the well-known sign that the ice had become too porous and spongy to hold water, and in a few hours would break away from the banks and begin to float seaward.

I had just sat down to breakfast, when a thunder-peal of cannon broke from the fortress. "What is that, Miss Benson?" I said to our hostess at the head of the table.

"That," she replied, "is the signal that the commander of the citadel, with his officers, is crossing the river, to present the Emperor at the Winter Palace with a goblet of Neva water in token of the return of spring. The Emperor will give him the cup back filled with ducats."

"Hurrah!" I cried; "then hey for old England!"

It took me some days to get the ship off, for it was tedious going backwards and forwards to Cronstadt. It was the Butter week time; that seven days' feast which precedes Lent, and is followed by the rejoicing of Easter. In the intervals of business, as I went to and fro to my agent's, I amused myself with observing the revelry of this great Russian festival.

There were thousands of peasants devouring blinni (pancakes), and caviare, honey-cakes, and nuts. There were swings, see-saws, and roundabouts. The great square of the Admiralty was the chief scene of the amusements. Close to the Winter Palace, the War-office, and the Senate-House, there were scores of temporary theatres, and long lines of ice mountains, down which the sledges kept rushing incessantly, amid the shouts and laughter of the good-natured but wild-looking peasants. At the doors of the theatres stood the tea-sellers, with huge brazen semovars smoking in the centre of their tables, and surrounded by countless teapots. The shopkeepers themselves, in fur caps and gloves, stood by their stalls, stamping, and clapping their hands, and shouting: "Gentlemen, will you please to take a glass of warm tea, with lemon or cream? How will you take the sugar?" (for a true Russian keeps his sugar in his mouth, and does not put it into his teacup). The Admiralty square was strewn with nut-shells; here and there a drunken bear of a peasant, a mere reeling bundle of greasy sheepskin, jostled against me, and then, with the simple-hearted politeness of his race, took off his hat and hiccuped out: "Pardon me, my little father, but remember it is Butter week."

One day I sallied out into the great square about noon to see the grantees of the capital drive through the fair, and I never saw such a sight. The line was guarded by mounted gendarmes, dressed like lancers, and wearing light blue uniforms with brown epaulettes. There were Chinese, Turks, Tartars, Germans, Englishmen, Russian princes, priests, soldiers, bearded merchants and their portly wives, Circassian officers, colonels of the body-guard in their eagle-crowned

helmets, and serfs, in a long procession of carriages, which, beginning at the rock on which Peter the Great's statue stands, reached to the base of the great granite column of Alexander, facing the enormous pile of the Winter Palace.

Tired at last of the procession, I turned aside to one of the largest of the wooden theatres. A clash of music from within announced the commencement of a new performance; joining the torrent of people, old and young, rich and poor, who were jostling for admittance, I at last made my way to the pay-place, where a mob of clamorous moujiks were thrusting out their hands with the admittance-money, in childish impatience.

I drew back to make way for a respectable old grey-bearded merchant and his pretty daughter, who, muffled up in a cloak trimmed with the fur of the silver fox, clung to his arm, and shrank back from the rough gesticulating crowd. I thought I had never seen so charming a girl, so tender in manner, so gentle and spring-like in beauty. The merchant and his daughter bowed and thanked me in broken English for my politeness, paid their money, and passed in.

I followed rapidly, but a crowd of peasants thrust themselves in before me, so that when I took my seat I could obtain no glimpse of the merchant or his pretty daughter.

The wooden theatre of the Katsiteli was an enormous building, built, as a peasant next me said, to hold five thousand persons. It had large galleries, balconies, and Corinthian pillars, hung with cheap drapery, and gay with red and blue paint. A vast chandelier lighted up the tent-like interior.

The theatre was already full when I entered, so that I had to content myself with a back seat in an upper box, not far from the head of one of the staircases—as I soon found by the keen-edged iced draught. I amused myself, while the overture was playing, with the motley view before me. The Tartar faces, only partially reclaimed from barbarism, were worth studying, now that they beamed with fun. The little oblique eyes glistened with enjoyment, the great bearded tangled heads rolled about in ecstasy. Here and there, the eye fell on a Polish or Circassian face, with large fine eyes, and almost a Greek contour. Every now and then, a group of grave portly merchants in furred caftans and boots, mingled with the serfs, but with an obtrusive reserve that showed they did so under protest. Their children, also dressed in caftans and boots, were exactly like themselves all but the beards. Nor was there any lack of women of the lower orders: rough, honest, Irish-looking women, few of them in bonnets, most of them with their heads bound round with coloured handkerchiefs.

I did not listen much to the music; it was that brazen mechanical sort of music, without colour or life, that no one listens to. By-and-by, it ended with a jolting crash. There was a moment's pause, and the curtain drew up. A deep hush passed over the troubled waves of the pit. The children clutched their fathers' hands, the

soldiers ceased their practical jokes, the countrywomen paused in their gossip, the boys stopped eating, every eye turned to the stage.

An honest old woman just before me—a housekeeper, as I judged by her dress—amused me especially by her child-like eagerness. She put on her spectacles, and leaned forward with both hands on her knees, to drink in every word.

The play was a little operetta, half French, half Italian. I think they called it "Rose and Lubin." It was a gay, trifling thing. The hero and heroine were villagers, and an old cross father, and a malicious fool, were the constant interrupters of their stolen meetings. Rose was dressed in a little tucked up gown of white silk striped with pink, and wore a gipsy hat; Lubin wore a nondescript sort of blue silk coat and flapped waistcoat, while the Zany tumbled into a thousand serapes in a sort of miller's dress all white, and a blue broad-brimmed hat. There was a good deal of hiding and searching about with soldiers, until the true lover enlists, and finally returns a General, to marry Rose. It was a flimsy pretty bit of nonsense, mixed up with dances and songs, and now and then a chorus; and it was all over in half an hour.

Silly as it was, it pleased the audience, who shouted, laughed, and encored everything. A display of fireworks was to follow, and then a short farce.

Between the acts, I tried the little Russian I knew, and asked the old woman, who had turned round and offered me some honey-cakes, "How she liked it?"

"My little father," she said, quite seriously, "it is the most wonderful thing I have ever beheld since I saw those accursed French act at Moscow, in Napoleon's time."

Suddenly all the clatter and laughter died away. The curtain had not risen, but a faint crimson light was shining behind it. It was the commencement of the pyrotechnic display, and I was curious to see what the Russians could do in these matters. The first scene was to be the illumination of the Kremlin at the coronation of the Emperor Alexander the First. Probably that was only the preparation, for, though the red light widened and glowed, the curtain, strangely enough, did not rise.

The people stamped and shouted. All at once the bajozo (the clown), in his white dress, ran forward, pale as death, his eyes staring, his hands tossing about like those of a madman. "We are on fire!" he shouted. "Save yourselves, you who can."

"Bravo, Ferrari!" cried the peasants, with roars of laughter. "Excellent! Viva Ferrari! Bravo, Ferrari!"

The clown fled from the stage, as it seemed, in an agony of feigned fear. The laughter redoubled. A man in evening dress rushed forward, whispered to the orchestra, and waved his hand to some men who were not visible to the audience.

The curtain rose swiftly at that ominous signal, and disclosed, to my horror, a rolling mass of fire and crimsoned smoke. Already the

flies had caught fire and were hanging in blazing streamers. Fire rose from below, fire gleamed from above, fire darted its quick tongues from either side. The theatre was on fire. The bajozzo had not been feigning, but was terribly in earnest.

I shall never forget the scream that burst from those four thousand people when the reality broke upon them. I had only an instant to look, but in that instant I saw row after row of white faces turn as by one impulse to the door. Then, came a stamping rush as of a herd of mad-dened animals. Many tore forward without a thought but of their own safety, others snatched up their children, others dragged forward their old mothers or fathers, or bore their wives or sweethearts in their arms. Then came the grapple for life, the trampling suffocating battle for existence that only served to hasten on death.

In many things I am coward enough, but in sudden danger I have always found myself cool and collected. Perhaps a sailor's frequent hazards, and the constant thought of the possibility of death, is a sort of training; perhaps it is a constitutional quality. I know not how it is. I only state the fact. I saw immediately that though for the moment safe, and far from the full torrent of the struggle, my hopes of escape were quite as desperate as the hopes of those who were trampling each other to death at the entrance below. Unfortunately, one of the great folding-doors opened inward. In the first rush it had been closed, and now the pressure was so great it could not be moved one way or other.

The flames were spreading rapidly, the smoke rolled towards us in blinding clouds, and from those clouds darted and leaped serpent tongues of fire. The flames seemed with cruel greediness to spring from seat to seat. The slips were blazing, the orchestra was a seething pit of fire. The screams and groans on all sides were heart-breaking.

I hesitated for a moment whether to remain where I was and meet death, or to breast the human whirlpool below. At that moment a surge of flame ran along the ledge of the next box to me, blackening and blistering as it went. The heat grew intense. I determined to make one struggle for my life. I ran to the head of the stairs and looked down. There, the herd of screaming shouting people fought with hands and feet in a horrible tangle of life and death.

I gave myself up as lost, when a hand seized my coat. It was the old housekeeper, screaming her entreaties to me to save her. I told her to cling to me and I would do what I could. It gave me courage to think I was struggling for some one besides myself. She knelt and prayed to God for us both.

I had placed myself at the edge of the crowd in order to husband my strength for a last effort. One thing I determined, and that was that I would not save myself by treading poor women and children under foot. Rather than that, I would let the fire burn me slowly,

or I would recommend my soul to God, throw myself into the crater behind me, and so die quickly. One agonising thought alone shot through my heart, and that was a thought for the tender girl I had seen so innocent and happy half an hour before.

Suddenly, as I stood there like a diver hesitating before he plunges, a peasant, scorched and burnt, dashed past me from the crowd that had trampled upon him, and, staggering forward, half-stifled with smoke, fell face downward dead at my feet. His axe, as usual with the peasants, was thrust in his belt behind. A thought of self-preservation, surely sent straight from Heaven, flashed through my brain. I stooped and drew out the axe.

"Make way there, or I cut down the first man who stops me!" I cried out, in broken Russian.

I half fought, half persuaded, a few to give way, until I reached the bottom of the stairs, and had the bare plank wall of the outer enclosure of the theatre before me.

"I will save you all," I cried, "if you will let me free my arm."

The old woman still clung to me, but as I advanced to strike my first blow at the plank partition that arose between life and death, there came a rush which for a moment separated us. I had no time or room to turn, but next moment I felt her grasp still firmer and closer.

One blow, and the splinters flew; a second blow, a plank gave; a third blow, and the blessed daylight poured in on us; a fourth blow, and a chasm yawned, wide enough for the passage of myself and my charge. After us, hundreds passed out rapidly.

I found myself among a crowd of shrieking women, who were calling on an officer standing in a barouche drawn by six horses, to save their husbands, sons, brothers. Suddenly a man with a scorched beard, his eyes streaming with tears, came and took from me the woman I had saved. I was so blinded with smoke and fevered with excitement, that I had scarcely given her a thought. All I knew was, that I had saved an old woman, and, by God's grace, opened a door of escape for some hundreds of otherwise doomed creatures.

When I looked round, I found the merchant whom I had before seen (he was the scorched and weeping man), shedding tears of joy over a beautiful girl who had fainted. The old woman had been divided from me in the tumult. The merchant's daughter it was who had then clasped me—it was her whom I had saved. Beautiful she looked as I bent over her and received her father's blessings.

The tall officer was the emperor. "My children," he kept saying to the mob, "I will save all I can! Bring that brave man to me."

I am not ashamed to repeat those words, though I did not deserve them.

"Englishman," he said to me in French, "the Russian nation owes you a debt of gratitude; it is for me to repay it; come to me to-morrow at the palace."

I bowed my thanks, and handed my card to one of the emperor's staff.

When the fire was subdued, and they began to dig for the bodies, the scene was agonising. Heaps of charred and trampled corpses lay under the smoking beams—some stifled, others trodden or beaten to death. Some were charred, others half roasted, many only burnt in the chest and head, the holiday clothes still bright and gay. In the galleries, women were found suffocated and leaning over the front boxes. In one passage they discovered a crowd of dead, all erect, like so many shadows marshalled from the other world. More than a hundred were found still alive, but dangerously burnt. Most of these afterwards died in the hospitals.

One little boy was discovered cowering unhurt under a bench; he had crept there when the burning roof began to break up and drop among the struggling multitude. The beams and dead bodies had so fallen as to form a shelter over his head, and there he had remained till we disinterred him.

The official returns set down the number of the dead as three hundred; but my agent told me that while he himself stood there, he counted fifty waggons pass, each laden with from ten to fifteen corpses; and many people made a much higher estimate.

I need not say much about my visit to the palace; suffice it to mention that the emperor rewarded me with an order that I highly prize. On the same day the priests offered up public prayers for the souls of the sufferers, on the site of the burnt theatre. It was a solemn spectacle, and as I rose from those prayers, full of gratitude to God for my deliverance, a rough hand grasped mine.

It was the merchant whose daughter I had saved. Tears streamed from his eyes as he embraced me and kissed my forehead and my cheek in the Oriental manner of his nation.

"My little father," he said, "I would rather have found thee than have cleared a thousand red rouble notes. Little Catherine, whom you saved, has been praying for you ever since. Come, you must dine with us. I will take no denial, for do I not owe you more than my life? Come, a droschky there—quick to the Fontanka; Catherine will leap for joy when she sees you."

That visit was an eventful one to me, for on my third voyage from that date I married Catherine Maslovitch, and a loving and devoted wife I found her. She is kissing my cheek as I pen these words.

But it is not to dwell upon my own personal good fortune and happiness, that I have written this plain remembrance. It is, that I may do

what little I can to impress upon those who may read it, that a rush from any building on fire is certain to be fatal, and that an orderly departure from it is certain deliverance. The Theatre, Concert-room, Church or Chapel, does not exist, through which a fire could spread so rapidly as to prevent the whole assembly from going out unscathed, if they would go free from panic. The Santiago case was an extremely exceptional one. The whole of the gaudy clap-traps were under the management of priests (the worst managers on earth), and what kind of priests they were, may be inferred from the fact that the base cowards all precipitately fled, and that not one of them had the manhood to stand at the Altar, his place of authority, where he could be seen on a platform made to render him conspicuous, and whence his directions would have been issued at an immense advantage. Again, the assemblage was mainly composed of women and children in light inflammable dresses. Again, the Show was lighted by lamps of paraffine dangling by strings from the whole of the roof above the people's heads, which dropped upon them, so many overturned pots of liquid fire, as the strings were burnt. But even under these specially disastrous conditions, great numbers of the assemblage would have been saved but for the mad rush at the door which instantly closed it. Suppose that rush not to have been made, suppose the door wide open, suppose a priest with the soul of a man in him to have stood on the Altar steps, passing the people at that end of the church, out of the Priestly door (of which we hear nothing, and which the last of those quick fugitives perhaps shut after him), and how changed the result! I entreat any one who may read this experience of mine, and may afterwards be in a similar condition, to remember that in my case, and in the Santiago case, numbers lost their lives—not because the building was on fire, but because there was a desperate rush at the door. Half a dozen men capable of self-control, might save as many thousand lives, by urging this on a crowd at the critical moment, and by saying "We will go the last."

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